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JAMES'S DEBT TO HAWTHORNE (I)

'THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE' and 'THE BOSTONIANS'

I.

THE question of indebtedness in art, the attempt to trace artistic influences, is quite as likely to lead towards distracting irrelevancies or academic obscurantism as towards any elevation from which one may take a clearer view and form a sounder judgment of the works in question. But some 'influences' distinguish themselves as especially pertinent to any essential critical evaluation, as providing a unique glimpse, from the wire of tenuous connection, of the intentions and motives, the tone and the tradition, of the works stretched out below. The influence of Hawthorne on Henry James is of this pertinent character, and it is now commonly recognized to be so: commonly, but not invariably. Mr. David Garnett, for example, has recently gone on record as regard-Hawthorne's influence, not only as obnoxious to James's work, but as confined to the earliest specimens of his art. 'It was from that sort of nonsense', Mr. Garnett temerariously declares, 'that he escaped in the following year when he came to live in Europe. A year in Paris, meeting Flaubert, Turgenev, Maupassant, and Zola altered him'. The influence of Hawthorne on James is not only demonstrably far greater than in the case of any of the men here named: it was an influence that persisted to the end, and in certain ways it grew more insistent towards the end. Its importance for James is to be gauged by the fact that Hawthorne was the great American predecessor, the only one (for James was apparently unacquainted with Melville) through whose art he approached his own native tradition. Hawthorne's methods of work, his moral preoccupations, the fundamental problems that confronted him as an artist in America, his attraction to a kind of allegory that was akin to symbolism, even to some extent the actual scenes and materials and types he chose to deal with, made a deep and lasting impression on James's 'fictions'. The idea that James took to precipitate flight in his youth, and breathing a freer air in Europe, reduced his art to a series of scathing comments on America, is one that, for anyone who takes James's work seriously, cannot be tolerated. Great art is not commonly the product of rootlessness, and despite his long life abroad, James was able to keep in touch with those values which for him, and no matter how much he liked or preferred to live in Europe, were the special product of the New World. Not until *The Ivory Tower* does anything like a radical

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questioning appear. The prevailing satire—the incessant fun-poking at Americans in Europe, or, for that matter, Americans at home—is, in the end, but the sustained corrective shaking that the vigilant parent must administer to the loved but undutiful and frequently impossible child. James dealt out the punishment to so many Americans, particularly to so many of his American heroines, that it came to pass off as animus against the nation; but beyond the sense one gets, from the heroines so shaken, of clattering parasols and disarranged bows and ruffles, one recognizes the deliberate design and intense desire of correcting absurdities and encouraging spiritual fineness. One sees, above all, the ingrained faith that what would ultimately appear when the manners were taught and the garden weeded, would be a benefit to be conferred—a benefit uniquely American and wholly virtuous, and *at least* as great as anything the Old World had, on her side, to offer in exchange. To-day, it seems to be Milly Theale, the American heroine who most conspicuously *doesn't* get shaken, who has driven home at last the point of James's benevolent intentions. But what she also goes to prove is that James understood his own genius too well to withhold frequently the disciplinary arm.

It is disconcerting to have to emphasize these points here, for they should be commonly current in Jamesian criticism, and until I read Mr. Garnett's unjust allusions to Hawthorne I had assumed that nowadays they most certainly were. To endeavour to focus James's art against a background of continental writers is not to focus it at all, and to eliminate Hawthorne from the history of his artistic development is simply to eliminate the best part of James—the part in which his genius most profitably functioned. It is to eliminate from his significant experience the literary tradition in America in which those moral values from which he never withdrew, and to which he finally returned with added emphasis, received their peculiarly national celebration. It is a tradition that Hawthorne and James share with Melville, but it is not to be confused with the tradition stemming from Whitman whose influence for American letters is analogous, in its exalted and stultifying afflatus, to the influence of Milton on eighteenth and nineteenth century English letters. The only point at which James was ever influenced by Whitman was when he had Isabel Archer describe Henrietta Stackpole to Ralph Touchett in terms recalling *Leaves of Grass*: 'I like the great country stretching away beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading till it stops at the green Pacific! A strong, sweet, fresh odour seems to rise from it, and Henrietta—pardon my similie—has something of that odour in her garments'. To which, one remembers, Ralph significantly replies, 'I'm not sure the Pacific's so green as that . . .'[1].

[1]James published, at the age of twenty-two, a brilliant review of Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, which ought to be given, but isn't likely to be, a prominent position among his critical writings. It is easily among his best pieces. Mr. Matthiessen reprints the review in

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The tradition of Hawthorne is quite distinct from anything of that kind, and the point, for an English reader, is worth keeping firmly in mind when one insists on the deep American quality in James. Whitman did as much to ruin American poetry and prose (when one remembers Thomas Wolfe one is tempted to think the prose has suffered even more) as railroads and macadam highways have done to ruin American scenery—and in every respect he is the reverse of Hawthorne: for if Hawthorne tried desperately to believe in the Future, it was a hope that the very nature of his moral preoccupation caused constantly to default.

If, for the sake of convenience at this point, one were to attempt a definition of Hawthorne's tradition, one might say that it was rooted in a traditional past, a remote (for America, certainly remote) New England past, in which Europe impinged directly on the New World and Calvinistic theology directly on moral action. By Hawthorne's time, both the Old World and the rigours of Calvinism had withdrawn into a hazy distance, but there was a fragrance and a memory that he knew, at least for a time, how to mould into form: how, in the medium of his art, to hold moral and psychological problems in a state of delicate suspension without, as in Whitman's case, precipitating a mud of optimistic conclusions. But the reality of Hawthorne is in his tone—a tone that is largely the evocation of regional intangibles—and it is unwise to generalize about it here. James had known Hawthorne's books from his early childhood. He relates in *A Small Boy and Others* the degree to which *The Scarlet Letter* worked upon his imagination, and how he lost himself in *The House of Seven Gables*. Books that exert their 'influence' in these opening years of life may continue to operate in the sensibility at levels where consciousness is not habitually active or attention alerted. They may acquire for the adult memory a picturesque and romantic beauty, but in the restless activity and 'expansion' of a sensibility that, in the American phrase, is 'moving on', they must seem at last to rest on the laurels of nearly forgotten achievements, watching like old or early settlers the later stages of 'developments' they no longer understand, but at whose inception they importantly assisted.

The James Family with an apology for its 'wrong-headedness'. But its 'wrongheadedness' consists, not in under-estimating Walt Whitman, but in over-estimating American opinion, which came to accept Whitman's effusions as easily as it accepted the optimism of the Chamber of Commerce. The evidence that James revised his taste later in life is far from convincing. It is difficult to take James's behaviour at Mrs. Wharton's in 1905 (which she describes in her autobiography) without a grain of salt; and in any event, when, in that year, James recognized Whitman as America's greatest poet he wasn't at all doing violence to his earlier opinion. The competition for that title was hardly impressive then, and James was probably as right in conferring it on Whitman as he was certainly right in the 1868 review.

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Much of the influence of Hawthorne on James is of this kind, and it is a matter of extreme tact and delicacy to isolate it. James's first overlapped Hawthorne's last twenty-one years of life, and Henry James, the very young New York City dweller, was not so remote from the New England moral milieu in which Hawthorne, with so much greater detachment than his neighbours, lived, as to leave him an utter outsider. There are passages in the earlier prose of James in which the 'tone' of Hawthorne is so clearly struck that, without extraneous information, it would be impossible to say just who had written which. And yet one cannot help sensing that this similarity is due not more to Hawthorne's immediate example than to mutual proclivities of temperament and shades of value that still characterized the American and determinedly local scene on which both James and Hawthorne drew. From one point of view this is an added difficulty in any attempt to trace the specific touches of Hawthorne on James's style and meaning, for they seem to merge in the common atmosphere created by regional effects of climate and colour; but in the end this doesn't minimize—it only increases—the Hawthornian presence. He seems to fade into the New England scene, and it is impossible for James to deal with the one without, whether faintly or urgently, invoking the other. In the end this is, perhaps, Hawthorne's greatest gift to James—the gift, literally, of a tradition; for it was through Hawthorne that James found New England artistically accessible, and it was, finally, this sense of rootedness, or more accurately, of fine and enduring relation, that safe-guarded him from becoming, for the edification of Mr. David Garnett, an Edwardian Maugham. Later, when his novels became a dialectic of nations, the Moderator, instead of a displaced cosmopolitan, was a novelist whose values were centred and whose aims were clearly focussed. Apart from this general contribution of Hawthorne's, and insofar as we can trace them, the *specific* 'influences' seem to have been utilized by James with varying degrees of success. It was, of course, Hawthorne's masterpieces, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*, as well as the short stories, which exerted the greatest attraction—but this attraction was, if deepest, of a nature extremely elusive. Before attempting to analyze it I should like to offer extended considerations of James's debt to the two last completed of Hawthorne's novels, *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*. *The Blithedale Romance* is a relative failure, and while common opinion is against me, *The Marble Faun* seems to me a far greater failure than *Blithedale*. Nevertheless, James was much influenced by them both, and it is surprising that the nature and extent of this influence has been so little noted by critics in the past. It is especially interesting to study in that we can trace the differences between James's early and late modes of assimilating the influence of Hawthorne, can see how relatively clumsily the later James was capable of dealing with it. Yet even here, and perhaps here most of all, its effect is to underline the essential Americanism of Henry James—an Americanism so fine that, paradoxically, one feels that America would have been its

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doom—and to reveal the fatuity of insisting, to any considerable extent, on the influences of Flaubert, Turgenev, Maupassant, and Zola. But in another sense it is distressing to begin this paper with the two late novels, for it will entail a series of quotations from Hawthorne in which he cannot possibly show to advantage. But the decline that sets in after *The House of Seven Gables* itself involves important factors that must at last be considered; and until that time one can but ask the reader who may not be deeply familiar with Hawthorne to withhold his judgment which, on the basis of such a showing, could scarcely be favourable. For it would be a pity if, even momentarily, Mr. Garnett's sneer at Hawthorne should seem justified.

II.

The relation between *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Bostonians* has never, I believe, been commented on, and yet, for the Hawthornian influence on James, it is of the first importance. I wish to trace the outline of that influence in *The Bostonians*, but it is a task one undertakes with diffidence, for the relationship is frequently a hidden one, and its strongest pressures are sometimes felt on more or less concealed areas. At the outset James has placed a distraction in the way. Writing of *The Bostonians* in his *Notebooks* in 1883, when the project was just getting under way, James said: 'Daudet's *Evangéliste* has given me the idea of this thing . . . I wished to write a very *American* tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions, and I asked myself what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life. The answer was: the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf'. But such a notice as this serves only as a distraction; it presents no real difficulty, for if Daudet's Madame Autheman helped to focus the question, it had been Hawthorne, years before, who had provided the answer before the question had been asked. In his *Life of Hawthorne* (1879), James had already noted that answer, and if he now preferred giving credit to Daudet it is probable that his sensibility had simply 'moved on' to such an extent that he failed to note the rate at which he was taking hints from the Hawthorne novel he had known for so many years.

There is a difficulty in speaking of the 'influence' any novel may have had on another. This difficulty is intrinsic in the nature of the novel itself. The 'influence' is likely to be spread out over a much wider—and mostly unquotable—area than is the case with a poem or play, and it is likely to show itself in a wider variety of ways than is usual in the other instances. And prose rhythm, however personal and distinguished, exhibits an absorbent quality that is in contrast with the revealing intensity with which an 'influence' may be said to vibrate in the more luminous medium of poetry. James had written in his *Life of Hawthorne*: 'There is no strictness in the representation by novelists of persons who have struck them in life, and there can in the nature of things be none. From the moment the imagination takes a hand in the

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game, the inevitable tendency is to divergence, to following what may be called new scents. The original gives hints, but the writer does what he likes with them, and imports new elements into the picture'. But if this is true in 'the representation by novelists of persons who have struck them in life', it is far more true in their representation of the persons and events and intentions that have struck them in fiction. Such an 'influence', in other words, must be largely a history of 'divergence', and the interest for us in comparing *The Blithedale Romance* with *The Bostonians* is simply that we are able to chart out the course of the 'divergence' with some accuracy. To do so helps illuminate the artistic intentions of both writers; and it helps to deepen the continuity of the American tradition.

The Blithedale Romance was suggestive to James in the first place in having provided a background scene which he wished not so much to emulate as to improve upon. In 1883 James had said that he wanted to write in *The Bostonians* 'a very American tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions . . . '. But four years before, his criticism of *The Blithedale Romance* had made the point even more explicitly:

> 'I should have liked to see the story concern itself more with the little community in which its earlier scenes are laid, and avail itself of so excellent an opportunity for describing unhackneyed specimens of human nature. I have already spoken of the absence of satire in the novel, of its not aiming in the least at satire, and of its offering no grounds for complaint as an invidious picture. Indeed, the Brethren of Brook Farm should have held themselves slighted rather than misrepresented, and have regretted that the admirable genius who for awhile was numbered among them should have treated their institution mainly as a perch for starting upon an imaginative flight'.

But if Hawthorne neglected to fill in the details of the Utopians at Brook Farm, there were enough *positive* hints in other directions that James was willing to utilize—particularly the theme of women's rights that he considered so typical of the American scene. The accent of Mrs. Farrinder or Olive Chancellor or Verena Tarrant, when they are eloquent on that subject, James might have learned directly from experience; and yet it is difficult to think that dialogue like the following was not ringing in James's memory when he came to ask himself 'what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life':

> 'Since her interview with Westervelt, Zenobia's continued inequalities of temper had been rather difficult for her friends to bear. On the first Sunday after that incident, when Hollingsworth had clambered down from Eliot's pulpit, she declaimed with great earnestness and passion, nothing short of anger, on the injustice which the world did to women, and equally to itself, by not allowing them, in freedom and honor, and with the fullest

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welcome, their natural utterance in public.

' "It shall not always be so!" cried she. "If I live another year, I will lift up my own voice in behalf of women's wider liberty".

'She perhaps saw me smile.

' "What manner of ridicule do you find in this, Miles Coverdale?" exclaimed Zenobia with a flash of anger in her eyes. "That smile, permit me to say, makes me suspicious of a low tone of feeling and shallow thought. It is my belief—yes, and my prophecy, should I die before it happens—that, when my sex shall achieve its rights, there will be ten eloquent women where there is now one eloquent man. Thus far no woman in the world has ever spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind. The mistrust and disapproval of the vast bulk of society throttles us, as with two gigantic hands at our throats! We mumble a few weak words, it is true, on a limited range of subjects. But the pen is not for woman. Her power is too natural and immediate. It is with the living voice alone that she can compel the world to recognize the light of her intellect and the depth of her heart!" '

Verena Tarrant's 'gift' of eloquence may not be directly traceable to Zenobia, whose record in that line is sufficiently remarkable; yet the accent of Zenobia's public manner (and her manner is never more public than when she is most private) is curiously near the idiom of the reformers in *The Bostonians*. This idiom as used by Hawthorne and James, and a little later by W. D. Howells in *The Undiscovered Country*—an unsatisfactory novel that is, at least in its first part, deeply indebted to both its distinguished predecessors—is undoubtedly in touch with the facts as they were, but the line of influence should not, on that account, be under-estimated. The tone of Verena Tarrant's little speech at Miss Birdseye's, to take one of a number of possibilities, comes too near the Blithedale precedent for accidental similarity to seem a wholly plausible explanation:

'I am only a girl, a simple American girl, and of course I haven't seen much, and there is a great deal of life that I don't know anything about. But there are some things I feel—it seems to me as if I had been born to feel them; they are in my ears in the stillness of the night and before my face in the visions of the darkness. It is what the great sisterhood of women might do if they should all join hands, and lift up their voices above the brutal uproar of the world, in which it is so hard for the plea of mercy or of justice, the moan of weakness and suffering to be heard. We should quench it, we should make it still, and the sound of our lips would become the voice of universal peace! For this we must trust one another, we must be true and gentle and kind. We must remember that the world is ours too, ours—little as we have ever had to say about anything!—and that the question is not yet definitely settled whether it will be a place of injustice or a place of love!'

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Verena's style, of course, is her own, and Zenobia's hovers somewhere between Verena's and Mrs. Farrinder's; but in *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne had laid down the suffragist vocabulary and the Transcendental speech rhythms authoritatively as far as literature was concerned, and James had the advantage of all Hawthorne had already done—and not done. For although it is difficult to believe, Zenobia's eloquence (despite Miles Coverdale's smile) is presented with a minimum of satirical intention on Hawthorne's part.

James must also have got the idea for Selah Tarrant's mesmeric exhibition, the purpose of which was to 'calm' his daughter before one of her talks, from the somewhat similar performance of Westervelt over the Veiled Lady. Although the surfaces of the suave Westervelt and Selah Tarrant are so opposite, as moral quantities they add up to almost identical portions. But it is part of Hawthorne's failure that Westervelt is endowed with a sinister Gothic quality that is radically misleading in any attempted valuation of what Westervelt stands for. The right note is struck in the matter of teeth. 'In the excess of his delight', Hawthorne writes of Westervelt, 'he opened his mouth wide, and disclosed a gold band around the upper part of his teeth, thereby making it apparent that every one of his brilliant grinders and incisors was a sham. This discovery affected me very oddly. I felt as if the whole man were a moral and physical humbug . . . '. Selah Tarrant, one remembers, had a fatuous habit of unfurling his wrinkles and showing his back teeth in what Olive Chancellor once thought of as his 'terrible smile', a smile that had the effect of illuminating Selah's moral quality, or lack of it.

James complained of 'the absence of satire' in *The Blithedale Romance*, 'of its not aiming in the least at satire, and of its offering no grounds for complaint as an invidious picture'. To read *The Blithedale Romance* in the light of this comment, and to compare its characters, fading away from time to time into unrealized shadows, with the sharply defined and clearly lighted characters in *The Bostonians* is not only to understand why Hawthorne's novel fails, but why it failed in a way that James found useful as a study in writing his own book. Westervelt and Selah, since they are already up for discussion, may serve to point the divergence in method. If Hawthorne's sense of evil was intense, his grasp of its concrete manifestations could sometimes be relatively relaxed, and his attempt to supply Westervelt with the accoutrements of Gothic Romance simply fail. The false teeth are right, or would be if they did not incongruously contradict all the other notes in the picture—the dark handsomeness, the worldly polish. And Westervelt's mesmeric talent, instead of deepening the mystery Hawthorne so insistently invites to hang over his head, merely heightens the farce. His vaguely glimpsed past offers itself to the imagination as something merely cheap and more vulgar than immoral. Hawthorne didn't know his man—didn't even know his 'evil'; and this must have been one of the chief points against which

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James reacted. How he reacted we know: for odd as it may seem, Selah is the counterpart of Westervelt in *The Bostonians*. Both are mesmerists who give public performances involving about the same degree and kind of charlatanism, both have highly questionable personal histories; and if Selah is the father of a girl prodigy who literally sells his daughter to Olive Chancellor, Westervelt is the brother-in-law (apparently) of Priscilla (who, under the title of The Veiled Lady is also a girl prodigy in the mesmeric line), and he exploits her in the same way that Selah has exploited Verena. It will be seen that James took over these counters and rearranged them with far greater coherence in his own novel—but the parallelism is evident enough.

In stripping Selah of every vestige of Gothicism, James showed him up with a cruel explicitness that, while in no way minimizing the 'evil' that Westervelt represented, provided a scathing comment on the nature of that 'evil', and by carrying it over into a realm of social comedy, related it to the whole milieu that had produced it in the first place. *The Bostonians* is one of James's wittiest novels—and one in which the wit, without losing a degree of status, is sometimes played with unusual broadness. To call its comedy 'brilliant' would be to insist on the moral illumination that reveals the dimensions of its meaning rather than on the mere glitter of surfaces that is usually accepted as justification for that adjective when applied to comedy in the social mode. The shifting distinction between comedy and tragedy is, perhaps, finally dependent on a radical ambiguity in the nature of moral experience itself, but whatever the explanation, the comic effects that James brings off on his carefully plotted stage frequently seem to be performed on trap doors opening immediately into subterranean regions of a vastly different character. To illustrate what I mean with a single but typical instance, one might take an excerpt from a description of Selah. He is being considered here from the viewpoint of his long-suffering and not too intelligent wife :

> 'Her husband always had tickets for lectures; in moments of irritation at the want of a certain sequence in their career, she had remarked to him that it was the only thing he did have. The memory of all the winter nights they had tramped through the slush (the tickets, alas! were not car tickets) to hear Mrs. Ada T. P. Foat discourse on the "Summer-land", came back to her with bitterness. Selah was quite enthusiastic at one time about Mrs. Foat, and it was his wife's belief that he had been "associated" with her (that was Selah's expression in referring to such episodes) at Cayuga'.

Everything from the superb name, Mrs. Ada T. P. Foat, and the title of her lecture, to that admirably chosen word, 'discourse', is right. The effect is deliciously comic; but when we hear Cayuga mentioned the comedy suddenly assumes a darker kind of life, different from what it was a moment before. We recall that Cayuga has just been mentioned a few pages back. Selah Tarrant had 'been

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for a while a member of the celebrated Cayuga community, where there were no wives or no husbands, or something of that sort (Mrs. Tarrant could never remember)'. The 'evil' that Selah represents carries the odour of disinfectants about it in that beautifully built up word 'associated', and if he is comic, Selah nevertheless is an actively sordid presence in the book that Westervelt could not begin to emulate in *Blithedale*. In connection with this passage, one recalls from a later chapter the occasion of Verena's first visit to Olive Chancellor:

> 'Verena talked of the marriage-tie as she would have talked of the last novel—as if she had heard it as frequently discussed; and at certain times, listening to the answers she made to her questions, Olive Chancellor closed her eyes in the manner of a person waiting till giddiness passed. Her young friend's revelations gave her a vertigo; they made her perceive everything from which she should have rescued her. Verena was perfectly uncontaminated, and she would never be touched by evil; but though Olive had no views about the marriage-tie except that she should hate it for herself—that particular reform she did not propose to consider—she didn't like the "atmosphere" of circles in which such institutions were called into question. She had no wish now to enter into an examination of that particular one; nevertheless, to make sure, she would just ask Verena whether she disapproved of it.
>
> ' "Well, I must say", said Miss Tarrant, "I prefer free unions" '.

The effect of Cayuga and Selah's 'associations' has clearly been to confirm Verena's remarkable innocence. Her preference for 'free unions' falls from her lips with charming modesty, as proof against the tortured nerves of Olive Chancellor as it is against the extravagant fraudulency of her father. James's tremendous and precise control over this vocabulary, his ability to impart even a human warmth to its sterilized phrases when they fall from the proper lips, make it possible for him to chisel his characters and values out of a hard rock of reality that gives him the right to challenge *The Blithedale Romance*. He was determined to make *The Bostonians* a satire in a way he almost resentfully recognized *Blithedale* failed, and to bring his full genius to the task of offering in *The Bostonians* 'grounds for complaint as an invidious picture'. It may have been because he felt guilty that he defended himself so earnestly to his brother when the latter charged him with having modelled Miss Birdseye on Hawthorne's aged but still living sister-in-law. At any rate, the defence is not convincing.

But if *The Blithedale Romance* was suggestive to James in the respects enumerated above, its chief suggestiveness must surely have resided in the way Hawthorne described the strange domination Zenobia exercised over Priscilla. This theme is ultimately incoherent and again Hawthorne seems in doubt as to what he is doing. But the theme as he develops it implies on the surface everything

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that James was to take up so richly in the Chancellor-Tarrant relation. Zenobia, except in her dominating quality, does not equate with Olive Chancellor, but this 'divergence' is something that embodies a good deal of interest in itself, and will have to be examined in some detail later on. Here in the beginning one might offer a quotation or two to indicate the emotional quality of the relationship. Zenobia is not the aggressive element in the way that Olive Chancellor is; Priscilla is so deliberately the victim that it is impossible to feel much sympathy for her, and in the passage below she seems more like Olive Chancellor in Verena's role than like Verena herself. This passage, taken from Chapter IV, describes Priscilla's first meeting with Zenobia. Miles Coverdale, the narrator, has just arrived at Blithedale (the Brook Farm of the story) to begin his experiment in Utopianism. It is the evening of a cold New England April day, and Coverdale and his colleagues (including Zenobia) are sitting around the fire in the farmhouse kitchen after supper, awaiting the arrival of another member of the community, Hollingsworth. Suddenly there is a knock at the door, and Hollingsworth enters with an unexpected guest:

> 'The stranger, or whatever she were, remained standing precisely on that spot of the kitchen floor to which Hollingsworth's kindly hand had impelled her. The cloak falling partly off, she was seen to be a very young woman dressed in a poor but decent gown, made high in the neck, and without any regard to fashion or smartness. Her brown hair fell down from beneath a hood, not in curls but with only a slight wave; her face was of a wan, almost sickly hue, betokening almost habitual seclusion from the sun and free atmosphere, like a flower-shrub that had done its best to blossom in too scanty light. To complete the pitiableness of her aspect, she shivered either with cold, or fear, or nervous excitement, so that you might have beheld her shadow vibrating on the fire-lighted wall. In short, there has seldom been seen so depressed and sad a figure, as this young girl's . . .
>
> * * * *
>
> 'As yet the girl had not stirred. She stood near the door, fixing a pair of large brown, melancholy eyes upon Zenobia—only upon Zenobia!—she evidently saw nothing else in the room, save that bright, fair, rosy, beautiful woman. It was the strangest look I ever witnessed; long a mystery to me, and forever a memory. Once she seemed about to move forward and greet her—I know not with what warmth, or with what words—but, finally, instead of doing so, she dropped upon her knees, clasped her hands, and gazed piteously into Zenobia's face. Meeting no kindly reception, her head fell on her bosom.
>
> 'I never thoroughly forgave Zenobia for her conduct on this occasion. But women are always more cautious in their casual hospitalities than men.
>
> ' "What does the girl mean?' cried she in a rather sharp

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tone. "Is she crazy? Has she no tongue?"

'And here Hollingsworth stepped forward.

' "No wonder if the poor child's tongue is frozen in her mouth", said he; and I think he positively frowned at Zenobia. "The very heart will be frozen in her bosom, unless you women can warm it, among you, with the warmth that ought to be in your own . . . "

' "You do not quite do me justice, Mr. Hollingsworth", said she, almost humbly. "I am willing to be kind to the poor girl. Is she a protégé of yours? What can I do for her?"

' "Have you anything to ask of this lady?" said Hollingsworth kindly, to the girl. "I remember you mentioned her name before we left town".

' "Only that she will shelter me", replied the girl tremulously. "Only that she will let me be always near her".

' "Well, indeed", exclaimed Zenobia, recovering herself, and laughing, "this is an adventure, and well worthy to be the first incident in our life of love and free-heartedness!" '.

In the end Priscilla, somewhat incredibly, turns out to be Zenobia's half-sister—a fact of which Priscilla, but not Zenobia, has been aware all along; but this fact is not revealed until late in the book, and even when it comes it does little towards offering an acceptable explanation of the psychological nature of the exhibition that has been offered. Hawthorne develops the theme along the lines indicated in the above passage, and finally offers something in the nature of a solution by making both Priscilla and Zenobia fall in love with the same man—Hollingsworth. It is clear that Hawthorne in describing the friendship of Priscilla and Zenobia was not consciously attempting anything like James undertook in *The Bostonians*. James had written in his Notebooks: 'The relation of the two girls should be a study of one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England'. Hawthorne had quite accidentally blundered into the psychological aspect of the theme, and having it on his hands, was quite incapable of evaluating it. The passage below reveals Hawthorne at his worst:

> 'It was curious to observe how trustingly, and yet how timidly, our poor Priscilla betook herself into the shadow of Zenobia's protection. She sat beside her on a stool, looking up, every now and then, with an expression of humble delight, at her new friend's beauty. A brilliant woman is often an object of the devoted admiration—it might almost be termed worship, or idolatry—of some young girl, who perhaps beholds the cynosure only at an awful distance, and has as little hope of personal intercourse as of climbing among the stars of heaven. We men are too gross to comprehend it. Even a woman, of mature age, despises or laughs at such a passion. There occurred to me no mode of accounting for Priscilla's behaviour, except by supposing that she had read some of Zenobia's stories (as such literature goes everywhere), or her tracts in defence of the sex,

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and had come hither with the one purpose of being her slave. There is nothing parallel to this, I believe—nothing so foolishly disinterested, and hardly anything so beautiful—in the masculine nature, at whatever epoch of life; or, if there be, a fine and rare development of character might reasonably be looked for from the youth who should prove himself capable of such self-forgetful affection'.

This kind of unintelligence, one can't help thinking, must have been partly due to the Transcendental sweetness of Mrs. Hawthorne that was at last beginning 'to tell' on her husband. This passage is important because it spots a defect of sensibility that was to make it impossible for Hawthorne to effect a successful transition between the manner of his two early romances and the realistic mode he was striving after in *Blithedale*. And yet Hawthorne could, on occasion, deal well enough with manners and society. There are a few effective scenes in *Blithedale* in which the realism is perfectly successful, and one remembers the dozens of wonderful scenes and passages in the *English Notebooks* that prove Hawthorne was not lacking in this kind of talent. What he did lack was a seasoned and maturely focussed experience of the world. The deficiency so glaring in the above passage—a deficiency that relates to the fundamental failure in *The Marble Faun*—is, broadly speaking, a deficiency of education—the absence of a tradition of manners that might have formed and refined the essential moral perceptions that come out so strongly in the earlier work. The evaluation or judgment in the passage in question is, at bottom, essentially an evaluation of manners, however deceptively it may pass itself off as one of morals (to momentarily propose a dichotomy between the two). There was a yawning discrepancy in the New England tradition between the two terms, and it was this discrepancy that compelled Hawthorne to use the 'romance' (as he called it) rather than the novel form. The failure of Hawthorne's late work is not a personal failure: it is a failure in his background, something omitted from his tradition and training. But however much we may excuse the unpalatable muddle-headedness of the above passage (or not excuse it: D. H. Lawrence once wrote of this aspect of Hawthorne, ' . . . one feels like giving Nathaniel a kick in the seat of his poor little pants'), it remained a blot that could be erased from the American tradition only by the brilliant corrective insights of *The Bostonians*. One now understands fully what James meant when he wrote, 'The portion of the story that strikes me as least felicitous is that which deals with Priscilla, and with her mysterious relation to Zenobia . . . ' Whether there was a conscious recognition of work to be done or not, it must have been when he read that passage that James instinctively took the line of duty that culminated in his greatest American novel.

The Blithedale Romance, then, offers a set of counters that James found ready for re-shifting in *The Bostonians*. We have women's rights, mesmerism, Boston, the suggestion of a neurotic

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friendship between two women. It also offered a suggestive set of characters. We have already considered how James was able to transform Westervelt into Selah Tarrant. But Hollingsworth, the reformer, has certain affinities with Basil Ransom. Both men 'save' their respective heroines by marrying them at the last minute. Hollingsworth in Chapter XXIII of *Blithedale* turns up at a lyceum-hall in a Massachusetts village at which there is to be a mesmeric exhibition involving the Veiled Lady. The New England audience is gathered, and the performance begins. A bearded personage in Oriental robes makes an address on hypnotism. Hollingsworth recognizes the mesmerist as Westervelt, and a moment later he recognizes Westervelt's 'subject', despite the veil, as Priscilla. Westervelt proceeds to induce a trance in Priscilla, or rather, he fails to induce one:

> 'Greatly to the Professor's discomposure, however, just as he spoke these words, the Veiled Lady arose. There was a mysterious tremor that shook the magic veil. The spectators, it may be, imagined that she was about to take flight into that invisible sphere, and to the society of those purely spiritual beings with whom they reckoned her so near akin. Hollingsworth, a moment ago, had mounted the platform, and now stood gazing at the figure, with a sad intentness that brought the whole power of his great, stern, yet tender soul into his glance.
>
> ' "Come", said he, waving his hand towards her. "You are safe!"
>
> 'She threw off the veil, and stood before that multitude of people pale, tremulous, shrinking, as if only then had she discovered that a thousand eyes were gazing at her. Poor maiden! How strangely had she been betrayed! Blazoned abroad as a wonder of the world, and performing what were adjudged as miracles—in the faith of many, a seeress and a prophetess; in the harsher judgment of others, a mountebank—she had kept, as I religiously believe, her virgin reserve and sanctity of soul throughout it all. Within that encircling veil, though an evil hand had flung it over her, there was as deep a seclusion as if this forsaken girl had, all the while, been sitting under the shadow of Eliot's pulpit, in the Blithedale woods, at the feet of him who now summoned her to the shelter of his arms. And the true heart-throb of a woman's affection was too powerful for the jugglery that had hitherto environed her. She uttered a shriek, and fled to Hollingsworth, like one escaping from her deadliest enemy, and was safe forever'.

The manner in which this must have given hints for the closing chapter of *The Bostonians* should scarcely require emphasizing here. The reader is referred again to that last scene in James's novel in which Basil Ransom carries Verena triumphantly away to marriage from the Boston Music Hall just before her appearance to the impatient audience, on the night that was to have been her greatest triumph. But if the above passage was the hint that James acted on, one can only say again how immeasureably better he did it.

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Verena's innocence is a positively realized thing in James that does not need the symbolical operation of a mystic veil to protect it from vulgar violation. It beautifully protects itself. We know that if James took the cue, he also took the warning: 'Hawthorne is rather too fond of Sibylline attributes—a taste of the same order as his disposition, to which I have already alluded, to talk about spheres and sympathies'. As he made clear, he really didn't like the Veiled Lady.

The history of Westervelt's and Hollingsworth's influence in shaping the characters of Selah Tarrant and Basil Ransom is one of 'divergence'. But if the 'divergence' is marked in the case of the two men, it is even more curiously so with Zenobia and Priscilla. James's imagination was stimulated by Zenobia, and he showed marked partiality for her. At the cost of repeating a quotation already given in part, I must give James's full tribute to Zenobia here:

> 'The finest thing in *The Blithedale Romance* is the character of Zenobia, which I have said elsewhere strikes me as the nearest approach that Hawthorne has made to the complete creation of a *person*. She is more concrete than Hester or Miriam, or Hilda or Phoebe; she is a more definite image, produced by a greater multiplicity of touches. It is idle to inquire too closely whether Hawthorne had Margaret Fuller in his mind in constructing the figure of this brilliant specimen of the strong-minded class, and endowing her with the genius of conversation; or, on the assumption that such was the case, to compare the image at all strictly with the model. There is no strictness in the representation by novelists of persons who have struck them in life, and there can in the nature of things be none. From the moment the imagination takes a hand in the game, the inevitable tendency is to divergence, to following what may be called new scents. The original gives hints, but the writer does what he likes with them, and imports new elements into the picture. If there is this amount of reason for referring the wayward heroine of Blithedale to Hawthorne's impression of the most distinguished woman of her day in Boston; that Margaret Fuller was the only literary lady of eminence whom there is any sign of his having known; that she was proud, passionate, and eloquent; that she was much connected with the little world of Transcendentalism out of which the experiment of Brook Farm sprung; and that she had a miserable end and a watery grave—if these are facts to be noted on the one side, I say; on the other, the beautiful and sumptuous Zenobia, with her rich and picturesque temperament and physical aspects, offers many points of divergence from the plain and strenuous invalid who represented feminine culture in the suburbs of the New England metropolis. This picturesqueness of Zenobia is very happily indicated and maintained; she is a woman in all the force of the term, and there is something very vivid and powerful in her large expression of womanly gifts and weaknesses'.

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It is no wonder that feeling as he did about Zenobia, James felt that the relationship she was put into with Priscilla represented a kind of inartistic double-dealing on Hawthorne's part. In writing *The Bostonians* James may be said, in one sense, to have avenged Zenobia, and completely exculpated her by showing in Olive Chancellor what, in such a relation, Zenobia would have been. In that description of the first meeting between Priscilla and Zenobia, it is Olive Chancellor with her morbid shyness, her pale pointed features, her nervous manner, and her precipitate flood of emotion during her first private interview with Verena that Priscilla reminds one of. And it is, on the other hand, the highly coloured Verena that Zenobia suggests—Zenobia with the tropical or the jewelled flower in her hair, Verena 'white as women are who have that shade of red hair; they look as if their blood had gone into it'. And both Zenobia and Verena are almost defined in the purity, one might almost say the innocence, of their theatricality. James says of Verena, 'If she had produced a pair of castinets or a tambourine [Ransom] felt that such accessories would have been quite in keeping'. And Hawthorne, in a similar accent, says of Zenobia: 'It was wronging the rest of mankind to retain her as the spectacle of only a few. The stage would have been her proper sphere'. And both women, naturally, have a highly histrionic sense of dress.

When James came to create Verena Tarrant he gave her the role of Priscilla, but he conferred—with a far finer sense of the situation than Hawthorne had displayed—the charm, beauty, and eloquence of Zenobia on her. The motives of Zenobia's victimization of Priscilla remain obscure in Hawthorne. James firmly lodged the motive of Olive Chancellor's victimization of Verena in Olive's own character, and presented a pre-Freudian psychological study of astonishing penetration. On each re-reading the sense of how perfectly James understood the workings of complex hidden tensions comes out freshly, and stronger than before. Gide complained that James always left out 'all the wild darkness', a charge that irritates me increasingly with time, for James is one of the few novelists who do not require a stage blackout to conceal the incapacities of their own psychological, artistic, and moral understandings.

Quantitatively speaking, Olive Chancellor has a greater burden of guilt to carry than any of the characters in *The Blithedale Romance,* or she would have if true self-knowledge formed any part of her character. The evil theme of 'dominance' is parcelled out in *Blithedale.* We have Westervelt's 'dominance' over Zenobia, Zenobia's 'dominance' over Priscilla, and Hollingsworth's 'dominance' over Zenobia. All these 'dominances' are compressed in *The Bostonians* into the single theme of Olive Chancellor's 'dominance' over Verena. And this theme is treated with an understanding and a fullness of development that Hawthorne in any one of his three 'dominances', or in all of them put together, cannot begin to equal. James's understanding

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of how to relate the characters to each other, how much substance and 'interest' to give them, precisely how to define their respective functions, could not be improved upon. His 'rearrangements' introduce the brightest clarity into the *Blithedale* shadows and confusion.

It remains only to consider Hawthorne's and James's final disposal of their characters. Faced with defeat, both Zenobia and Olive court martyrdom—Zenobia, literally, in a dramatic suicide, and Olive, figuratively, taking upon herself the hideous task of doing what James has made it inescapably clear her whole soul would most recoil from—announcing to the disappointed, shouting audience in the Music Hall that Miss Tarrant would not speak that evening:

> 'If he [Ransom] had observed her, it might have seemed to him that she hoped to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived, in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces. She might have suggested to him some feminine firebrand of Paris revolutions, erect on a barricade, or even the sacrificial figure of Hypatia, whirled through the furious mob of Alexandria'.

The suicide of Zenobia herself James considered nearly the most tragical denouement in all Hawthorne. As for Priscilla and Verena—if they are 'saved' at last, the nature of the salvation in both cases is open to question. Hawthorne is more explicit than James. We have a glimpse of Priscilla years later, taking a walk through the woods with Hollingsworth, who seems to have attained to a remarkably precocious senility, thereby forcing on the willing Priscilla the role of a trained nurse. If, on the other hand, Basil Ransom doesn't have anything to expiate (Hollingsworth's 'dominance' over Zenobia, is, of course, his 'crime', for which, it appears, Priscilla is likely to suffer equally with the culprit) there are some remarkable hardnesses in his character. They are necessary, one feels, if he was to defeat Olive Chancellor. But their presence hardly makes the prospect any better for Verena, and James ends on this note:

> '"Ah, now I am glad!" said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed'.

The relationship, then, between *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Bostonians* seems to be, point by point, nearer than between any other of Hawthorne's and James's novels. It has seemed worth examining at considerable length at the outset of this essay, because it is not a case of simple parallelism or an exhibition of 'influence' only. It would be easy to point out several dozen instances of that sort of thing in James's novels where, in some concrete particular, some turn of plot or twist of character, James had demonstrably borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, from the earlier novelist.

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Mr. F. O. Matthiessen in *The American Renaissance* has mentioned a number of these parallelisms; but if they are to be useful they should lead beyond themselves, back to deeper similarities and mutual participations. The similarity between these two novels is important, not simply as exhibiting James's indebtedness to Hawthorne, but because both men are seen to be working in a tradition (as well as making it), to be dealing with moral quantites so permanently and recognizably established in the American scene that the success could not, in James's case, be a matter merely of discovery or of aboriginal insight working on untreated material. Part of the success of *The Bostonians* is a matter of subtle creative pressures, of skilled and instructed reticences and boldnesses, of a security of knowledge that could only have occurred where there were the beginnings of a tradition trained (even if imperfectly trained) in handling that particular knowledge. It is an interesting comment on the important function of tradition in the creative act that James's masterpiece among the American novels should have had so conspicuous a precursor in American literature. Those who like to call James an international novelist are usually prompt to supply some European lineage or other; but if the American half of the equation is to be filled out, Hawthorne's is the only name that fits.

The question of whether or not James was conscious of 'using' *The Blithedale Romance* for his own novel is unimportant. The device of the portrait in *The Sense of the Past* unquestionably derived, in its ultimate source, from Colonel Pyncheon's portrait in *The House of Seven Gables,* and yet in the notes for the unfinished novel one can see James working into the idea of its function in his plot with no conscious sense whatever of Hawthorne's precedent. He had known Hawthorne too long and too intimately to be much concerned with him at that level of awareness; but this, so far from minimizing the indebtedness, proclaims its depth and suffusion. The question of how *consciously* James drew on *Blithedale* can, perhaps, be better answered when the nature of the two men's relationship has been more fully explored. But in the meantime it might be well to bear in mind, as decidedly relevant to *The Bostonians,* one of James's many tributes to Hawthorne:

> 'Out of the soil of New England he sprang—in a crevice of that immitigable granite he sprouted and bloomed. Half of the interest that he possesses for an American reader with any turn for anlysis must reside in his latent New England savour; and I think it no more than just to say that whatever entertainment he may yield to those who know him at a distance, it is an almost indispensable condition of properly appreciating him to have received a personal impression of the manners, the morals, indeed of the very climate, of the great region of which the remarkable city of Boston is the metropolis'.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

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THE SHAKESPEAREAN DIALECTIC

AN ASPECT OF 'ANTONY & CLEOPATRA'

AT each stage in his development Shakespeare displays a surprising capacity for renewal. Let us assume that *Antony and Cleopatra* comes after *King Lear*, that is goes with *Coriolanus*, and that both it and *Coriolanus* immediately precede the so-called 'last period'. Between *Antony and Cleopatra* and the plays that have gone before there is no obvious connection in theme or technique. At the same time, only Plutarch links it with *Coriolanus*. Nothing in it would normally prepare us for *Cymbeline* or *The Winter's Tale* to follow. This apparent isolation is one of the main obstacles to arriving at a correct focus on the play. There seems to be a break in the internal continuity of the Shakespearean series—a continuity of series which stretches, I think, from *Henry VI* to *King Lear* at least, and which could possibly be extended to include *Timon*: though here again there is something of a lesion, and special factors, external to the 'inner biography' of Shakespeare as a playwright, might have to be invoked to explain all that is happening. *Timon*, however, it might be granted, is the aftermath of *King Lear*. Can the same be said about *Antony and Cleopatra*? This is the broad problem which I propose to examine.

I.

To describe the swiftness of *Antony and Cleopatra* we need to draw on the imagery of the cinema. There is more cinematic movement, more panning, tracking, and playing with the camera, more mixing of shots than in any other of Shakespeare's tragedies. At the same time the technique is always under deliberate, almost cool, control. *Antony and Cleopatra* has none of the haphazardries of *Pericles* nor any of the plot-imposed vagaries of the last period. The technique is inwardly related to the meaning Shakespeare has to express. What is indicated is not enervation or indifference but rather what Coleridge recognized as 'giant power', an 'angelic strength'.

The swift traverse of time and space has often been commented upon. There is also the mixing. Egypt is called up vividly in Rome by Enobarbus' descriptions. Rome is always felt as a real presence in Egypt. On the frontiers of Empire Ventidius discusses what repercussions his victories will have on the people at staff-headquarters. Equally the present is interpenetrated by the past. Antony's past, particularly, is always powerfully put before us:

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'Antony,
Leave thy lascivious wassails. When thou once
Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heels
Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against
Though daintily brought up, with patience more
Than savages could suffer; thou didst drink
The stale of horses, and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at; thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge;
Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
Which some did die to look on'.

So too is Cleopatra's:

'I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's; besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out'.

The hinterland of the quarrels that alternately divide and bring together again the triumvirate is constantly being suggested, troubles, truces, and manoeuvres that go back (like Cleopatra's love affairs) to Julius Caesar's days. In no other of his plays is Shakespeare at such pains to suggest the stream of time past and its steady course through the present. In the public world of Roman affairs this is especially so. In the other world of Cleopatra the same suggestion of perspective always frames what is said and done. Is Antony merely the last of a long succession of such lovers? Or is this affair singular and unique as all love-affairs claim to be? Not enough weight has been given in recent assessments of the play to the ambiguity which invests everything in Egypt equally with all things in Rome. Yet this ambiguity is central to Shakespeare's experience in the play. If it is wrong to see the 'mutual pair' as a strumpet and her fool, it is also wrong to see them as a Phoenix and a Turtle.

In addition to the swiftness and the variety of the impacts, and the interpenetration of the parts of time and space as they mix in the speech of the people immediately before us, there is also the added burden which Shakespeare's 'giant power' of compelling presentation imposes. The effects are at once those of a rapid impressionism and a careful lapidary enrichment. Each figure, however minor, has its moment when it comes up into the brilliant foreground light—the Soothsayer with his 'infinite book of secrecy', the Old Man wishing 'much joy o' the worm', Enobarbus describing the barge on the Nile, Lepidus asking 'What manner o' thing is your crocodile?', Ventidius giving once for all the field-officer's view of the higher-ups, the Eunuch and the game of billiards, Dolabella, Octavia, even Fulvia whom we never see: the canvas seems covered with Constable's snow.

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Another feature of Shakespeare's technique which makes for the impression of uniqueness might be pointed to here. Shakespeare seems to be innovating also in methods of character-portrayal. Some of the stage-conventions as described by Miss Bradbrook do not seem to apply. Which, for example, are we to believe—what Caesar says about Antony after he is dead, or what he says about him, and his conduct towards him, while he is alive? What was Fulvia's 'character', about whom we have such conflicting reports? Throughout the play we are forced by Shakespeare himself not to take comment at its face value. Judgments are more personal here than elsewhere. Goneril and Regan discussing their father's condition are reliable judges. Caesar, Antony, Enobarbus, the soldiers Demetrius and Philo, are not—or not to the same extent. Judgment knits itself back into character as it might do in Ibsen, and character issues from a mutable and ambiguous flux of things. Antony's momentary *agnorisis* can be generalized to cover the whole play:

> 'Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish;
> A vapour sometimes like a bear or lion,
> A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory,
> With trees upon't, that nod unto the world
> And mock our eyes with air: thou hast seen these signs;
> They are black vespers pageants . . .
> That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water . . .
> My good knave, Eros, now thy captain is
> Even such a body: here I am Antony,
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave'.

There is something deliquescent in the reality behind the play. It is a deliquescence to the full display of which each judgment, each aspect pointed to, and each character, is necessary, always provided that no single one of these is taken as final. The proportion of comment and judgment on the central characters is higher in *Antony and Cleopatra* than anywhere else in Shakespeare. This further underlines its uniqueness and the difficulties of coming by an adequate final assessment. Antony and Cleopatra are presented in three ways. There is what is said about them; there is what they say themselves; there is what they do. Each of these might correspond to a different 'level' of response. Each is in tension against the others. Each makes its continuous and insistent claim on the spectator for judgment in its own right. The pigments vividly opposed to each other on the canvas have to mix in the spectator's eye.

Underlying, however, the bewildering oscillations of scene, the over-lapping and pleating of different times and places, the co-presence of opposed judgments, the innumerable opportunities for radical choice to intervene, there is, I think, a deliberate logic. It

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is this which gives the play its compact unity of effect and makes its movement a sign of angelic strength rather than a symptom of febrility. It is the logic of a peculiarly Shakespearean dialectic. Opposites are juxtaposed, mingled, married; then from the very union which seems to promise strength dissolution flows. It is the process of this dialectic—the central process of the play—which we must trace if we wish to arrive anywhere near Shakespeare's meaning.

II.

The first scene opens with Philo's comment on the 'dotage' of his general:

> 'those his goodly eyes
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust'.

Nothing more has time to be said. Antony and Cleopatra themselves appear. Their first words express the essence of romantic love, a tacit contradiction of all that Philo seems to have just suggested:

Cleo: If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
Ant: There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.
Cleo: I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
Ant: Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

Again immediately, an attendant announces the arrival of news from Rome. The atmosphere of the Egyptian court changes. We see the opposite effects of the intrusion on the two it most concerns. Antony will not hear the messengers. Cleopatra insists that he shall. Antony is taunted with a wicked caricature of what the news might be, and of the relation in which he stands to Rome. Yet the version is sufficiently like to make Antony blush—from anger, or shame, or both:

> 'Your dismission
> Is come from Caesar; therefore hear it, Antony,
> Where's Fulvia's process? Caesar's would I say? both?
> Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's queen,
> Thou blushest, Antony, and that blood of thine
> Is Caesar's homager; else so thy cheek pays shame
> When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds'.

Antony's reaction is to pitch his romantic vows higher still, asserting his independence of Rome in terms that should leave no doubt as to where he stands:

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'Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless'.

This again has all the ring of absolute and heroic self-committal. Cleopatra's reply, however, is typical both of herself and of the ambivalence that runs through everything in the play:

'Excellent falsehood!
Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?
I'll seem the fool I am not; Antony
Will be himself'.

Her first words might be oxymoron or plain disbelief. The next call up the vista of Antony's past, with its broken pledges and unconscious insincerities—if they were no more. Her last words are highly ambiguous and turn the whole situation upside-down: she is the helpless creature wilfully blinding and deceiving herself. Antony is the self-contained and calculating manipulator of her weaknesses. In replying, Antony is like the man innocent of jujitsu who thinks he is pushing when really he is being pulled:

'But stirr'd by Cleopatra.
Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh . . .
. . . What sport tonight?'

Shakespeare gives the operative lines a subtle falsity of note that could equally indicate hearty play-acting, slightly awkward self-consciousness, or wilful evasion. Cleopatra's answer is realist and comes with a new urgency:

'Hear the ambassadors'.

It drives Antony also to something we can recognize as more fully himself—something that is perceptive and tinged with the masterful as well as the reckless:

'Fie, wrangling queen!
Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself in thee fair and admir'd.
No messenger, but thine; and all alone,
Tonight we'll wander through the streets and note
The qualities of people. Come, my queen;
Last night you did desire it: speak not to us'.

This is not only Antony's view of Cleopatra's character, and a reliable account of what she is really like. It is also an expression

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of the deliquescent reality at the heart of the play which incarnates itself most completely in the persons of the hero and heroine. After Antony's speech, with this two-fold authority it bears, the comment of the soldiers seems peculiarly limited and out of place:

> *Dem*: Is Caesar with Antonius priz'd so slight?
> *Phil*: Sir, sometimes when he is not Antony,
> He comes too short of that great property
> Which still should go with Antony.
> *Dem*: I am full sorry
> That he approves the common liar, who
> Thus speaks of him at Rome; but I will hope
> Of better deeds tomorrow.

It serves to remind us, however, of the world that stands around the lovers, the world of the faithful soldier who can only understand the soldierly, the world of 'the common liar' that enjoys the unpleasant 'truth', the world, too, of Rome and Caesar that is radically opposed to the world of Egypt and Cleopatra.

The first scene is only slightly more than sixty lines long. Yet it is sufficient to illustrate all the main features of the play we have pointed to, and extensive enough to set up the swinging ambivalences—the alternatives and ambiguities constantly proposed to choice—which will govern and control our whole reaction to the play. There is the speed and oscillation, the interpenetration of Rome and Egypt and of present and past. Above all there is the dialectic marriage of the contraries and their dissolution through union. The jealousy of Cleopatra towards Fulvia, the outrage of Caesar to Antony's *amour propre*—these negative repulsions can serve to hold the mutual pair together as firmly as positive attractions. Antony and Cleopatra are opposed to the world that surrounds and isolates them. In this isolation their union seems absolute, infinite, and self-sufficient. Yet the war of the contraries pervades the love too. In coming together they lapse, slide, and fall apart unceasingly.

The outstanding achievement of the first scene is the way in which it begins with the soldiers' condemnation and returns us at the end to the same thing—allowing for this side eighteen lines out of the sixty-two. Yet at the end we are no longer satisfied as to the adequacy of what Demetrius and Philo say. Not that what they say has been disproved by what we have seen of Antony and Cleopatra. They are and they remain a strumpet and her fool. To have any judgment at all is to choose, apparently, either the judgment of the soldiers at the beginning of the scene or the lovers' own self-assessment that immediately follows it. (Coleridge chose the former; Dr. Sitwell and Mr. Traversi take the latter). To entertain either judgment, however, is not enough. The deliquescent truth is neither in them nor between them, but contains both. *Antony and Cleopatra* is Shakespeare's critique of judgment.

Scene I played out romantic love and lovers' quarrels on a

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lofty stage. It also gave the sharp local comment of the soldiery. Scene II takes the theme of love below-stairs and changes key. It also gives the universal comment of the Soothsayer, with its suggestion that everything is already decided, the tragedy is in the nature of things, now is already over, the future past, the present always:

> 'In nature's infinite book of secrecy
> A little can I read . . .
> I make not but foresee . . .
> You have seen and prov'd a fairer former fortune
> Than that which is to approach'.

In place of the 'romance' of love, Charmian, Iras, and Alexas give the 'reality'. The reality in this case is a strong succession of rich, powerful, and adequate males:

> 'Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon, and widow them all; let me have a child at fifty to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage; find me to marry with Octavius Caesar, and companion me with my mistress'.

It reads like a parody of Cleopatra's aspirations, just as the women's bickering and teasing of Alexas mimic Cleopatra's handling of Antony:

> 'Alexas,—come, his fortune, his fortune. O! let him marry a woman that cannot go, sweet Isis, I beseech thee; and let her die too, and give him a worse; and let worse follow worse, till the worst of all follow him laughing to his grave, fifty-fold a cuckold!'

This seems a nightmare version of Antony's fate—the reflection in a distorting mirror of the thoughts and feelings that course through Antony after Cleopatra's desertion in the disastrous sea-fight.

The group is interrupted in its fortune-telling by the entry of Cleopatra. She is looking for Antony. Her remarks prepare us for the different mood about to establish itself:

> 'Saw you my lord? . . .
> He was dispos'd to mirth; but on the sudden
> A Roman thought hath struck him'.

Antony is heard approaching. Cleopatra immediately goes off. Now that he is coming she will refuse to see him.

When Antony appears he is surrounded by the messengers from Rome and immersed in Roman affairs. He veers savagely to the point of view both of the soldiers in the first scene and 'the common liar' in Rome. Throughout the play this is what marks him off from Cleopatra and makes him a more complex meeting-ground for the opposites than even she is herself. He can understand and respond to the appeal of Rome as much as he can understand and respond to Egypt:

> 'Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue;
> Name Cleopatra as she's called in Rome;

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Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase; and taunt my faults
With such full licence as both truth and malice
Have power to utter. O! then we bring forth weeds
When our quick winds lie still; and our ills told us
Is as our earing. Fare thee well awhile . . .
These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage'.

The second messenger brings news of Fulvia's death. It is characteristic of the play that what is hated during life should find favour once it is dead. Later in this scene that is reported to be the case with Pompey in the popular reaction to him:

'our slippery people—
Whose love is never link'd to the deserver
Till his deserts are past—begin to throw
Pompey the great and all his dignities
Upon his son'.

This is what happens too in Antony's case when, once he is dead, Octavius sings his praises. It also happens when Cleopatra is thought to have committed suicide and Antony flings from vituperation to acclamation almost without pausing. It happens now wih Fulvia. Antony says:

'There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it:
What our contempts do often hurl from us
We wish it ours again; the present pleasure,
By revolution lowering, does become
The opposite of itself: she's good being gone.
The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.
I must from this enchanting queen break off'.

Typically, when he joins the general, Enobarbus summons all the counter-arguments. To leave Egypt would be to kill Cleopatra. 'She is cunning', Antony says, 'past man's thought'. 'Alack, sir, no', Enobarbus rejoins,

'her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report: this cannot be sunning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove'.

Even if we read Enobarbus' words as irony, the double-irony that works by virtue of the constant ambivalence in the play still turns them back to something approaching the truth: and Cleopatra's real distress and anxiety over Antony's departure have already cut through the scene like a knife. The ding-dong continues:

Ant: Would I had never seen her!
Eno: O, sir! you had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work.

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Ant: Fulvia is dead.
Eno: Sir?
Ant: Fulvia is dead.
Eno: Fulvia?
Ant: Dead.
Eno: Why, sir, give the gods a thankful sacrifice . . . this grief is crown'd with consolation; your old smock brings forth a new petticoat.

Antony, however, has made up his mind to go back to Rome.

Antony does go back to Rome—but not in the mood and not with the motives of thorough-going reformation in which he remains at the end of Scene II. In Scene III the alchemy of the Shakespearean process is further at work. It works to make Antony do the thing resolved upon but for reasons the very opposite of those which led him to the resolve. The scene of his departure is chosen for Cleopatra's most sincere avowal. Having tormented Antony beyond all bearing she suddenly breaks off with:

'Courteous lord, one word.
Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it;
Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it;
That you know well: something it is I would—
O my oblivion is a very Antony
And I am all forgotten'.

Antony's final words in the scene almost catch the very idiom of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*:

'Let us go. Come.
Our separation so abides and flies,
That thou, residing here, go'st yet with me,
And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee.
Away!'

It is, so to speak, the honeymoon of the contraries—only possible while the lovers are apart.

III.

The first three scenes show how pervasive is that quality in technique and vision which we have called the Shakespearean 'dialectic'. It comes out in single images, it can permeate whole speeches, it governs the build-up inside each scene, it explains the way one scene is related to another. The word 'dialectic', of course, is unfortunately post-Hegelian. The thing we wish to point to, however, in using the word, is Shakespearean. In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare needs the opposites that merge, unite, and fall apart. They enable him to handle the reality he is writing about—the vast containing opposites of Rome and Egypt, the World and the Flesh.

Rome is the sphere of the political. Shakespeare uses the contraries (long before Blake) to give some sort of rational account

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of the irrationals there involved. The common people, for example, is 'the common liar'. Antony has already noted that its love is 'never link'd to the deserver till his deserts are past'. Caesar, too, has his own cold knowledge of the same fact:

> 'It hath been taught us from the primal state
> That he which is was wished until he were;
> And the ebb'd man, ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,
> Comes dear'd by being lack'd. This common body,
> Like to the vagabond flag upon the stream,
> Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,
> To rot itself with motion'.

The great men, however, behave exactly as they say the commons do, too. With Antony, Fulvia becomes dear'd by being lack'd. In Caesar's case it is the same. The threat of Pompey makes him suddenly appreciate the grandeur of Antony's leadership, courage, and endurance. The magnanimous praise of Antony in Act V is only possible because Antony by then is dead. The law is general: judgment is a kind of accommodation to the irrational on reason's part:

> 'men's judgments are
> A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
> Do draw the inward quality after them,
> To suffer all alike'.

Even soldierly 'honour' is rooted in the ambiguous. When Pompey's man mentions his treacherous scheme for disposing of all Pompey's rivals at one blow (the rivals are also Pompey's guests on board ship) Pompey exclaims:

> 'Ah, this thou should'st have done
> And not have spoke on't. In me 'tis villainy;
> In thee 't had been good service. Thou must know
> 'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
> Mine honour it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
> Hath so betray'd thine act; being done unknown,
> I should have found it afterwards well done,
> But must condemn it now'.

The law is general because it reflects the nature of the terrene world —the tidal swing of the opposites on which all things balance on a motion that rots them away.

The self-destruction of things that rot with the motion which their own nature and situation dictate is almost obsessive with Shakespeare throughout the play. The political world is the manipulation of the common body they despise by the great men whom the commons can never love until they are safely rid of them. The pattern which remains constant in all the possible groupings is that of open conflict alternating with diseased truce, neither of them satisfactory:

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'Equality of two domestic powers
Breeds scrupulous faction. The hated, grown to strength,
Are newly grown to love . . .
And quietness, grown sick of rest, would purge
By any desperate change'.

Compacts between the great men merely represent the temporary sinking of lesser enmities in front of greater:

'lesser enmities give way to greater.
Were't not that we stand up against them all
'Twere pregnant they would square amongst themselves'.

Pompey's is a correct appreciation. It is because of him that Octavius and Antony are reconciled. They will rivet the alliance by means of Antony's marriage to Caesar's sister. Enobarbus knows automatically that this union is a certain way of making conflict ultimately inevitable:

'you shall find the bond that seems to tie their friendship together will be the very strangler of their amity'.

Octavia is one of Shakespeare's minor triumphs in the play, beautifully placed in relation to the main figures and the tenour of their meaning. Her importance is apt to be overlooked unless her careful positioning is noted. Her presence gives a symmetrical form to the main relations of the play. Octavia is the opposite of Cleopatra as Antony is the oposite of Caesar. She is woman made the submissive tool of Roman policy, whereas Cleopatra always strives to make the political subservient to her. (It is the thought of being led in triumph by Caesar as much as the thought of Antony's death which finally decides Cleopatra for suicide). Where Caesar and Cleopatra are simple and opposite, Octavia—like Antony—is a focal point for the contraries. There is nothing in her as a 'character-study' to account for the effect her presence has. It is rather that she is transparent to the reality behind the play and one of its least mistakable mediators. On the occasions when she appears herself, or when mention is made of her, it is the interfluent life of this reality rather than the personality of its vehicle which fills the scene.

Her first entry is significant. It comes immediately after the triumvirate and Pompey have made their pact. We have just heard the following satiric account of Lepidus' behaviour—and Lepidus, like Octavia, has to stand between the two demi-Atlases:

Agrippa: 'Tis a noble Lepidus.
Eno: A very fine one. O! how he loves Caesar.
Agrippa: Nay, but how dearly he adores Mark Antony.
Eno: Caesar? Why, he's the Jupiter of men!
Agrippa: What's Antony? the god of Jupiter.
Eno: Spake you of Caesar? How, the nonpareil!
Agrippa: O Antony! O thou Arabian bird!

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Then the triumvirate and Octavia come on. Octavia stirs Antony deeply. But the imagery in which his vision of her is clothed carries us past the person described to the 'varying tide' by which everything in the play is moved:

> 'Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
> Her heart obey her tongue; the swan's down feather
> That stands upon the swell of the full tide
> And neither way inclines'.

Octavia never escapes from her position midway between the contraries that maintain and split the world. With Antony away in Athens, her brother first falls on Pompey then finds a pretext to destroy Lepidus. He is now ready to mount his attack on the last remaining rival, his 'competitor in top of all design'. Hearing of it, Octavia cries:

> 'A more unhappy lady,
> If this division chance, ne'er stood between,
> Praying for both parts . . .
> . . . Husband win, win brother,
> Prays and destroys the prayer; no midway
> 'Twixt these extremes at all'.

Octavia's is the alternative plight to Cleopatra's for womanhood in the play. The choice is merely between alternative methods of destruction—either at one's own hands, or through the agency of the process. The 'swan's down feather', like the 'vagabond flag', can only swing on the tide until it rots with motion.

Rome is the world of politics and policy. Its supreme term is Octavius Caesar himself. He, like Octavia, must be brought into relation with the pattern which he helps in part to define. Half his significance is lost if he is seen only as a 'character'. In Octavius' case we have aids external to the play which help towards a clear focus on what Shakespeare intends by him. He falls recognizably into Shakespeare's studies of the 'politician'—the series that begins with Richard III and continues down through Edmund.

Octavius is a notable development in the figure which started as a machiavel pure and simple. Shakespeare now betrays no sign of alarm, no hint of revulsion or rejection, almost no trace of emotion in putting him into a story. He is taken completely for granted. He has arrived and he will stay. He is part of the structure of things. He is 'Rome'. In matters of politics and policy it is obvious that only the politicians count: and politics is one half of life. The politician is a perfectly normal person. Given all his own way he would doubtless bring—as Octavius is certain his triumphs eventually will bring—a 'universal peace'. To be normal like him, of course, and to enjoy the peace he offers, two conditions are necessary. First, one must sacrifice the other half of life; then, one must be prepared to make complete submission. By the time Shakespeare comes to depict Octavius he has refined away all the accidentals from the portrait—the diabolism, the rhetoric, the elaborate hypocrisy, the perverse glamour: everything but the

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essential deadliness and inescapability. Octavius marks an advance on Goneril and Regan. He shares their impatience with tavern and brothel. He has no share in the lust which entraps even them. We might almost doubt whether Octavius has any personal appetite at all, even the lust for power. His plan to lead Cleopatra in triumph has the appearance of a desire for personal satisfaction, but it is more likely that it fits into an impersonal wish on Caesar's part to subdue all things to Rome. Caesar, of course, is Rome—but a kind of impersonal embodiment. He is more like a cold and universal force than a warm-blooded man. He is the perfect commissar, invulnerable as no human being should be. Egypt has no part in his composition.

Caesar has the deceitfulness of the machiavel, but he plays his cards without any flourish. He can rely on his opponents to undo themselves: they are more complicated than he. He puts the deserters from Antony in the van of his own battle:

> 'Plant those that are revolted in the van,
> That Antony may seem to spend his fury
> Upon himself'.

The strength and weakness of those ranged against him constitute Caesar's fifth column. The opposition will rot away or eat the sword it fights with.

It is in the last act that Egypt and Rome confront each other singly, the duplicity of Caesar pitted against the duplicity of Cleopatra. There is no doubt as to who shall survive the contest. The tension is maintained throughout the fifth act only by the doubt left in the spectator's mind right up to the end as to which way Cleopatra will jump: will she accept submission or will she take her own life? The whole play has prepared us for just this doubt. In a sense, whichever way the decision goes, it is immaterial. The point of the play is not the decisions taken but the dubieties and ambivalences from which choice springs—the barren choice that only hastens its own negation. Rome, from the nature of things, can admit no compromise. Egypt, equally, can never submit to its contrary. So Cleopatra kills herself.

Cleopatra has been loved by recent commentators not wisely but too well. As Caesar impersonates the World, she, of course, incarnates the Flesh. Part of Shakespeare's sleight of hand in the play—his trickery with our normal standards and powers of judgment—is to construct an account of the human universe consisting of only these two terms. There is no suggestion that the dichotomy is resolvable: unless we are willing to take the delusions of either party as a resolution, the 'universal peace' of Caesar, the Egypt-beyond-the-grave of Antony and Cleopatra in their autotoxic exaltations before they kill themselves.

Cleopatra is the Flesh, deciduous, opulent, and endlessly renewable:

> 'she did make defect perfection . . .
> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale

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Her infinite variety; other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish'.

The Flesh is also the female principle. Cleopatra is Eve, and Woman:

'No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares'.

She is also Circe:

'Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!'

Shakespeare gives Cleopatra everything of which he is capable except his final and absolute approval. Cleopatra is not an Octavia, much less a Cordelia. The profusion of rich and hectic colour that surrounds her is the colour of the endless cycle of growth and decay, new greenery on old rottenness, the colour of the passions, the wild flaring of life as it burns itself richly away to death so that love of life and greed for death become indistinguishable:

'there is mettle in death which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying'.

The strength of the case Shakespeare puts against her is undeniable. The soldiers, and Caesar, and Antony when the consciousness of Rome speaks through him, are right, as far as they go. The strength of the case for her is that it is only Rome that condemns her. And Egypt is a force as universal as Rome—as hot as the other is cold, as inevitably self-renewing as the other is inescapably deadly. And the only appeal that can be made in the play is from Egypt to Rome, from Rome to Egypt. And neither of these is final, because between them they have brought down Antony, the 'man of men'.

For the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* is above all the tragedy of Antony. His human stature is greater than either Cleopatra's or Caesar's. Yet there is no sphere in which he can express himself except either Rome or Egypt, and to bestride both like a colossus and keep his balance is impossible. The opposites play through Antony and play with him, and finally destroy him. To Caesar (while Antony is in Egypt, and alive) he is:

'A man who is the abstract of all faults
That all men follow'.

To Cleopatra he appears instead a 'heavenly mingle';

'Be'st thou sad or merry,
The violence of either thee becomes,
So it does no man else'.

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When she sees him returning safe from the battlefield she cries:

> 'O infinite virtue! Com'st thou smiling from
> The world's great snare uncaught?'

After he is dead she remembers him as a kind of Mars:

> 'His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
> A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
> This little O, the earth . . .
> His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
> Crested the world; his voice was propertied
> As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
> But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
> He was a rattling thunder. For his bounty,
> There was no winter in't, an autumn 'twas
> That grew the more by reaping; his delights
> Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back above
> The element they lived in; in his livery
> Walk'd crowns and crownets, realms and islands were
> As plates dropped from his pocket . . .
> . . . Nature wants stuff
> To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t'imagine
> An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
> Condemning shadows quite'.

This, of course, is again the past catching fire from the urgent needs of the present, flaring in memory and imagination as it never did in actuality. Antony is nothing so unambiguous as this. The most judicious account of him is that of Lepidus when he is replying to Caesar's strictures:

> 'I must not think there are
> Evils enow to darken all his goodness:
> His faults in him seem as the spots of heaven,
> More fiery by night's blackness; hereditary
> Rather than purchased, what he cannot change
> Than what he chooses'.

Here the ambiguities of the play's moral universe get their completest expression: faults shine like stars, the heaven is black, the stars are spots. Ambivalence need go no further.

IV.

The earlier criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra* tended to stress the downfall of the soldier in the middle-aged infatuate. More recent criticism has seen the play as the epiphany of the soldier in the lover, and the re-assurance of all concerned that death is not the end. In the view that has been put forward here neither of these is right. The meaning of *Antony and Cleopatra* is in the Shakespearean 'dialectic'—in the deliquescent reality that expresses itself through the contraries.

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Antony and Cleopatra swims with glamour. Once we lose sight of the controlling structure of the opposites which holds the play together we are at the mercy of any random selection from its occasions. And occasions abound—moments, opinions, moods, speeches, characters, fragments of situation, forked mountains and blue promontories, imposed upon us with all the force of a 'giant power'. It is, then, eminently understandable that critics should succumb like Antony or hold aloof like Demetrius and Philo.

The Roman condemnation of the lovers is obviously inadequate. The sentimental reaction in their favour is equally mistaken. There is no so-called 'love-romanticism' in the play. The flesh has its glory and passion its witchery. Love in *Antony and Cleopatra* is both these. The love of Antony and Cleopatra, however, is not asserted as a 'final value'. The whole tenour of the play, in fact, moves in an opposite direction. Egypt is the Egypt of the biblical glosses: exile from the spirit, thraldom to the flesh-pots, diminution of human kindness. To go further still in sentimentality and claim that there is a 'redemption' motif in Antony and Cleopatra's love is an even more violent error. To the Shakespeare who wrote *King Lear* it would surely smack of blasphemy. The fourth and fifth acts of *Antony and Cleopatra* are not epiphanies. They are the ends moved to by that process whereby things rot themselves with motion—unhappy and bedizened and sordid, streaked with the mean, ignoble, the contemptible. Shakespeare may have his plays in which 'redemption' is a theme (and I think he has) but *Antony and Cleopatra* is not one of them.

Antony and Cleopatra is an account of things in terms of the World and the Flesh, Rome and Egypt, the two great contraries that maintain and destroy each other, considered apart from any third sphere which might stand over against them. How is it related to the plays of the 'great period', the period which comes to an end with *King Lear*?

The clue is given, I think, in the missing third term. *Antony and Cleopatra* is the deliberate construction of a world without a Cordelia, Shakespeare's symbol for a reality that transcends the political and the personal and

> 'redeems nature from the general curse
> Which twain have brought her to'.

One must call the construction deliberate, because after *King Lear* there can be no doubt that Shakespeare knew exactly where he was in these matters. Both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* follow North's Plutarch without benefit of clergy. Both Antony and Coriolanus were cited by the sixteenth century moralists as notable examples of heathen men who lacked patience—the one committing suicide, the other rebelling against his country. In *Antony and Cleopatra* suicide is the general fate of those who wish to die. Cleopatra gives the audience a conscious reminder of the un-Christian ethos involved:

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'All's but naught;
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad: then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us?'

The Christian world-view in Shakespeare's time turned round a number of conceptions which were covered by the Elizabethans in their examination of the meanings of 'Nature'. The theme of 'Nature' runs through the whole of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Timon*. Its absence from *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests Shakespeare's satisfaction that for him the theme is exhausted. He is inwardly free now to look at a classical story, deliberately excise the Christian core of his thought, and make up his account in terms of what then remains over.

This explains the effect, I think, of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Freedom from the compulsive theme of the Natures, the conscious security gained from having given it final expression, enabled Shakespeare to handle something new and something which was bound to be intrinsically simpler. Part of the energy formerly absorbed in grappling with theme now bestows itself on technique. *Antony and Cleopatra* gives the impression of being a technical *tour de force* which Shakespeare enjoyed for its own sake.

The excision also explains, I think, the tone of the play—the sense of ripe-rottenness and hopelessness, the vision of self-destruction, the feeling of strenuous frustration and fevered futility, that which finds its greatest expression in Antony's speech before he gives himself his death-blow:

'Now
All length is torture; since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no further. Now all labour
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength; seal then, and all is done'.

The excision, finally, explains what might be regarded as a diminution of scope in *Antony and Cleopatra*. We are, of course, only comparing Shakespeare with himself. The theme of Rome and Egypt, however, is simpler than the theme of 'Nature', the trick of using the contraries (again, for Shakespeare) relatively an easy way of organizing the universe. It is unusual, at any rate, for Shakespeare to rely on one trick so completely as he seems to do in *Antony and Cleopatra*. At times we are almost tempted to believe he has fallen a victim of habitual mannerism.

One last comment might be made. We referred at the beginning of this essay to Shakespeare's surprising capacity for self-renewal. *Antony and Cleopatra* is not the aftermath of *Lear* in any pejorative sense. There is something in it that is new and exciting and profound. Shakespeare remained still the youngest and the greatest of his contemporaries. In *Antony and Cleopatra* he is making his own adjustments to the new Jacobean tastes. The

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play is Shakespeare's study of Mars and Venus—the presiding deities of Baroque society, painted for us again and again on the canvasses of his time. It shows us Virtue, the root of the heroic in man, turned merely into *virtú*, the warrior's art, and both of them ensnared in the world, very force entangling itself with strength. It depicts the 'man of men' soldiering for a cynical Rome or whoring on furlough in a reckless Egypt. It is the tragedy of the destruction of man, the creative spirit, in perverse war and insensate love—the two complementary and opposed halves of a dis-creating society.

JOHN F. DANBY.

REQUIRED LITERATURE COURSES AS A CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURE

A NOTE ON AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

THIS essay is based on the experience of teaching required English subjects for two years in two State Universities, one in the Midwest, and one in the Pacific Northwest, of the U.S.A. The problems described may seem crude, the arguments obvious, even blatantly so. It is because the problems are crude, because the conclusions they suggest, however obvious, are so difficult to act upon in the circumstances, that I believe the article to be worth writing. Only through contact with these American students, and the conditions in which they are taught, have I learned what phrases like 'educating an élite' 'equality of opportunity', 'a core of common culture' and so forth mean and do not mean.

'Culture' in American education cannot be used in Mr. Eliot's sense of something imbibed in family and community life; for much American teaching is intended to wean children away from an alien cultural inheritance. For many Americans national education is not even given in their mother tongue. Genuine American cultures took root in New England, in the Southern States; but they have disintegrated in a newer community which has produced, so far, little that touches the general public but a commercial pseudo culture frankly intended for the immature in years or mentality. 'This situation is well known, and results in the passing round of terms like 'decadence' and 'disintegration', terms which, when not analysed, can only make people shut their eyes and let the landslide carry them away. (I refer readers here to Mr. Bantock's comments in his article *'Mr. Eliot and Education'*,

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Scrutiny, March 1949.) Two questions are important here. Can education do anything to salvage or create culture in a community where it has disintegrated? Are the people born into a disintegrated culture necessarily disintegrated in themselves? Further, the educators in a democratic society who adopt the belief that culture, or a substitute for it, can be acquired at school, must consider two hypotheses—that the community as a whole can be given, through education, a lowest common measure of culture, which will be sufficiently high to form a worthy national culture; or that, the first hypothesis being unsound, there is a fair means of selecting an élite to acquire culture and transmit it to others. The first hypothesis is the most popular in America, and is acted upon in the State University. The second is implicit in the selection of gifted students for private colleges.

Before commenting on attempts to supply Americans with 'a common core of culture' one should understand the conditions American teachers have to face.

Many State Universities accept all students who graduate from High School, that is who obtain passing grades in a sufficient number of subjects, computed by adding up 'credit hours'. The more students, the larger the grant the University receives; thus educators are in the hands of administrators with financial considerations in mind. After the war the G.I. bill of rights, subsidising further education for all veterans,[1] brought into the Universities a large number of men who would not previously have considered trying to obtain a degree. A large number of entrants drop out during the first two years, but not generally before they have been 'exposed to' (as the saying is) required language and literature. In such classes there are students from every type of home, including nearly illiterate, and foreign speaking, and every kind of school, from the small rural, to the huge impersonal urban. There are few references a teacher can make which will be understood by all students; Superman, Li'l Abner, Walter Winchell, The Reader's Digest, Lana Turner, hotrods, baseball and boxing stars, would meet general recognition. One cannot assume knowledge of classical, literary or biblical allusions,[2] or historical ones, except

[1]Veterans, in America, are, of course, ex-service men. I would like to add that many justified, and are justifying, the educational grant received, and that it is among them the most serious students are often found.

[2]A student once came up after class and asked 'Is Apollo in Shakespeare or the Bible?' I spoke about Greek myths, but he still seemed dissatisfied, and said something about a man in a play 'whose wife done him wrong, or he thought she did'. I then remembered Ronald Colman was appearing at a local cinema in *'The Double Life'* and asked if he meant 'Othello'. I was then able to satisfy him. I don't give this anecdote in order to sneer at a student who had the curiosity to seek for knowledge, but his state of mind is typical of the sort of confusion one finds.

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for the highlights of American history. If English readers are inclined to feel complacent at this point, they should ask themselves what would happen if the Universities were filled by an influx of school leavers, qualified merely by finishing the courses provided in any type of English secondary school. I believe only one section of English students would show to advantage—the more intelligent among those educated at secondary schools of the 'grammar school' type. This is not intended as a criticism of the teachers in other kinds of school, but as a comment on the conditions which they often teach. The American High School is certainly inferior to the English Grammar School in preparing the more intelligent students—it makes one very uneasy about the policy of sinking English Grammar Schools into comprehensive schools of the American type.

There is not space here to discuss probable reasons why many students come from High School so inadequately prepared in English. Sound English teaching is hampered by the system of organising work in self-contained units of study, by reading extracts and short poems rather than long, complete works, and by testing the student's reading by brief, factual 'quizzes', as they are called. I have written more fully on testing and grading in two articles on American State Universities that appeared in March and April in *'The Journal of Education'*. I would add that there are classes in American schools well taught by inspiring teachers.

It should be remembered as well that American educators are faced with a difficulty 'old countries' do not have to meet. However far we in England have disrupted our culture, we still live in the family mansion. Our literature is closely bound up with our history and geography, so that in nearly every locality children's imaginations can be awakened by the sight of buildings, pictures, or a countryside associated with what they read. In only a few American areas is this true. Whatever culture Americans decide to study as 'a common core' and a basis for understanding and creating American literature they must choose from another continent. A knowledge of Western European or, at any rate, English literature, is generally recognized as essential to the 'common core', but English literature is, to young Americans, a foreign literature, its writers foreign writers.

Working conditions present other problems. Teachers must often take unduly large numbers in inconvenient and uncomfortable rooms. Many students resent compulsion to attend required courses. They want a University degree as an economic and social asset, and are sometimes making effort and sacrifices to obtain it. Before they can enter a school, such as Dentistry, or Business Administration, they find they must make a passing grade in essay-writing, and in the study of out of date authors who seem unable to express themselves in 'plain English'. They rebel in spirit; but they must sit through the classes, where their chief aim is to discover, and satisfy, the grading idiosyncrasies of the professor.

The kind of course planned to meet these conditions varies, but

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is usually one of two types—the Survey, or the Appreciation Course. The Survey Course is intended to provide a chronological framework, and the class uses a book of extracts. Last year I taught from a syllabus that prescribed three terms' work, three classes per week. The first term's assignment was from Beowulf (in translation) to the seventeenth-century lyric poets, the second from Milton to Coleridge, and the third from Byron to Housman. Extracts to be read included *Gawayne and the Green Knight* (translated), Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* or Jonson's *Volpone,* the first book of the *Faerie Queene,* the first two books of *Paradise Lost* and *Adonais.* Most major and some minor figures were represented. Many of the students had never read material requiring more concentration than the *Reader's Digest,* and some probably read voluntarily only comic strips, sports pages, and campus news. For most this was almost their first, and certainly their last taste of English Literature. A small percentage would eventually take English as their major study. For them the course might provide a useful framework, though anything so superficial seems a dangerous beginning. It cannot make a student aware of the living connection between writers and their period, and so he will only learn chronology in a mechanical way. One enthusiastic student compared the course to 'offering a child a candy stick and continually taking it away again'. He thought it an excellent way of destroying a student's interest by constant frustration. An attempt is being made in this department to improve this particular course, making it less crowded by giving at least a week to each author. But the value of a Survey Course as a means of filling a 'cultural gap' is frequently questioned by its teachers.

The course which I taught in another University had no name other than 'English 430' but its object was to interest students in different kinds of literature, drawn from English and American authors, and introduce them to the commoner literary techniques and critical terms. It was experimental, and generally regarded as unsatisfactory by the department. For administrative reasons it was crammed into ten weeks, with five classes a week. Text books were used—a selection of short American novels (Henry James, Stephen Crane, Scott Fitzgerald, etc.), a selection of plays (Sophocles, Congreve, Wilde, O'Neill, etc.) and *'Understanding Poetry'* by Brooks and Warren. The reason why students used text books rather than the library was shortage of library accommodation. The chief difficulty, apart from speed and superficiality, was the shapelessness of the course. I taught it four times over during one year and was never able to give it coherence. I do not suppose it will remain long in its present form. Like the Survey Course, it illustrates the temptation, in planning one course as the student's sole experience of literature, to include far too much, and to give too little attention to the students' mentality, interests and previous education.[3]

One second term composition course I taught had possibilities as an introduction to literature. It was devoted to the preparation

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of a term paper based on a study of selected essays of Addison and Steele. The course was supposed to give training in setting out and footnoting a paper of this kind, but its greatest value lay in making the students read closely, and face problems of interpretation. When one realised the difficulty they had in understanding when Addison was writing humorously and ironically, and in grasping the relationship between Addison and Steele, and the fictitious Spectator, one was appalled to think that the same students were struggling with the Survey Course previously described. Addison and Steele were chosen for this course partly because of the difficulty of obtaining suitable material in conveniently published form. They were too alien to hold, for ten weeks, the interest of students living in the Pacific Northwest.

The two years during which I taught at these two different institutions were too brief a time for me to do much to alter my own errors of approach. I found myself, by the end, concentrating on two main points—convincing the students, at the cost of being irrelevant and anecdotal, that the writers crammed into their text books were once living men and women, and interpreting the works by reading aloud and explaining difficult words and phrases. I was not able to use discussion as much or as effectively as I could wish because of the size of the class, the unwillingness of the students to make themselves conspicuous, and appear to be trying for better grades by joining in, and, in one case, the type of room in which I taught—a gloomy amphitheatre built for the Dramatic School.

I will return now to phrases I quoted at the beginning of the essay and reconsider them in the light of the, admittedly limited, experience which I have had.

It is idle to argue about whether one should educate a 'cultural 'élite'. One does that anyway. No one has yet evolved a system whereby some students will not be more sensitive than others to literature, more able to enter into imaginative sympathy with the cultural life of other ages and peoples. However much such students are handicapped by being placed in large classes with those less intelligent and less interested, and by being given stereotyped assignments and mechanical tests, they will remain sensitive and intelligent. But there is a great risk that they will also be arrogant, superficial and cynical. Humility is not acquired through being forced to keep the same pace as one's inferiors; to be truly humble one should be allowed one's full scope, and so come to appreciate one's limitations. The problem is not the existence of an élite, but its relationship to the rest of the community. Danger comes when it regards the less perspicacious as creatures to be fooled, and used for its own ends. I would not argue that it is good to segre-

[3]The Director of the course told us of one student who was failing and was sent to him. After a long discussion he found the boy did not know how to read poetry. He believed each line should be read as a complete sentence.

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gate the best students in Colleges or Universities of the Ivory Tower kind. But I am sure it is bad to throw them into educational factories without considering their special needs. That is not 'equality of opportunity'.

If selection is necessary, there must be a method of selection. I do not myself believe that any psychologically devised test is as good, at any rate for candidates for courses in the humanities, as the essay type of examination. I admit accurate grading of such is not easy.

There is a type of student who must not be forgotten in this discussion—the student who is interested in literature, and sensitive to its values, and yet through poor previous education, or some other reason, is too inarticulate to reach the level of University work. Such have an important part to play in keeping interest in literature alive in their community. But their latent interests and abilities are not easily discovered by methods of educational testing. Patient teaching may be necessary before some unexpected flowering comes; and then it may be only expressed by a gleam in the eye or a colloquial phrase. The presence of such students shows that further education should be widespread for those who wish to avail themselves of it. Preferably it should be in tutorial groups.

A 'common core of culture' cannot be provided by isolated literature courses given in Universities if there has been little foundation provided earlier in school life. Some traditional material, in particular the best known Greek myths and Bible stories, is necessary as a basis for understanding modern literature. The aim should not be to 'do' certain reputable authors and books, but to learn to read with comprehension and interest. If pupils can do this it is not necessary to worry too much about a 'common core'. Such a conception is artificial in a disintegrated society. The important thing is that as many people as possible should, at their level of understanding, appreciate human values as shown through literature. The most sensitive and intelligent will be the most refined, and, let us hope, least prejudiced in their selection.

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'THE FAMILY REUNION'

> We do not know very much of the future
> Except that from generation to generation
> The same things happen again and again.
>
> *Murder In The Cathedral.*

DIFFERENT compositions require different efforts to read them comprehendingly, and it is a peculiar and consistent effort that *The Family Reunion* demands. This effort is, I should say, towards vigilance—a vigilance against misunderstanding—and it arises partly from the fact that the play is deeply personal, partly from the elaboration and intricacy of the theme. Much denser here than in *Murder In the Cathedral* are the echoes from Eliot's poems. There is, as so frequently, the obsessive consciousness of the seasons (very apposite in a play that deals with similar cyclical phenomena), and there are the very nearly direct references to poems like *The Hollow Men*, *The Waste Land* and, particularly, *Burnt Norton*.[1] This in itself argues a degree of self-implication not found in the earlier play, and the argument is endorsed when we consider that even as early as *The Waste Land* (1922) Eliot was already touching on the theme of hereditary misfortune or guilt. The fact of personal preoccupation having been tentatively established, however, it is necessary, for the time being, to discard it from the conscious appraisal of the play: inductive biography or psycho-analysis, especially of a living writer, is never criticism. I mention it here only to make a point to which we shall later revert.

As Eliot himself several times remarks in the text, the theme of the play is 'unsayable', only to be stated obliquely, and it is this fact which determines the technique he uses. This, the technique, can only be called algebraic. It is the unfocussing of what one may presume to be a concrete, personal experience until only its abstract pattern, its 'algebra', is perceived, and the superimposition of this pattern upon a different and fictitious aggregate of facts. It is with these fictitious facts that we are concerned. They have so often been misrepresented that a short preliminary summary will not be out of place.

Briefly, we may say that *The Family Reunion* is the story of two generations, and of the interaction of the older upon the younger. We are given to understand that the marriage between Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensey, and the deceased Lord Monchensey was not a happy one: 'There was no ecstasy'. Also we are given imprecise but substantial suggestions that at some time during the marriage—'a summer day of unusual heat'—there occurred an adultery between the husband and his wife's sister, Agatha. At

[1]Characteristically derogatory remarks on fortune-telling and astrology (as in *The Dry Salvages*) also figure.

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some time after this Lord Monchensey planned to murder his wife, but was deterred from doing so by Agatha, her reason being that Amy was pregnant. As she later confesses to Harry, Agatha felt then that only vicariously, through Amy's children, would she ever enjoy motherhood. The child is in due course born, and this is Harry, the main figure in the play. There are two more sons and then the father, Lord Monchensey, dies. Harry is from an early age destined by his mother to marry an eligible and conformist cousin, Mary, but this arrangement does not come off. Instead he marries a stranger whom only Agatha is permitted to meet. Seven years after the marriage this younger Lady Monchensey disappears during a voyage across the Atlantic with her husband, and her death is presumed to be accidental. About a year after the voyage Harry returns to his home, Wishwood, for the family reunion that is arranged for his mother's birthday, and, almost upon entering the house, declares that his wife did not fall overboard, but that he pushed her. It is from this point onwards that the main action of the play develops. The problem is to analyse, dramatically, the motive which has prompted this 'murder', and to show how the analysis relieves Harry of some of the burden of guilt under which he is suffering, restoring him from the 'awful privacy of the insane mind' to a place 'somewhere on the other side of despair'.

One preliminary, however, we need to be quite sure about before proceeding with the development, and that is this question of the 'murder'. I have put the term in inverted commas partly because it is never quite confirmed, and partly because it is more of a symbol than a fact. As Agatha later remarks,

> What we have written is not a story of detection,
> Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.

The act is not, that is to say, a physical reality, a push; rather is it to be equated with a whole complex of attitudes, the whole context of that (possibly imaginary) moment of 'murder' on the boat. If it means anything, it is nearer to the concept of unhappiness in marriage than to the concept of killing. I will later endeavour to show what difficulties arise in relation to this treatment of the term. For the moment it is perhaps enough to realize that the act is consistently soft-pedalled. With this in mind we can proceed with the play.

The analysis of Harry's state of mind is naturally complex—a succession of hints, of indirect elucidations, that does not so much conclude in certitude as slowly arrive at a preponderance of it. Two of the characters are principally concerned in helping Harry to explain himself to himself: Mary and Agatha. It might be said in this connection that while Mary diagnoses Agatha cures. It is Mary who, in the second scene of Part I, points out to Harry that his suffering is not an objective thing, but something self-imposed: the sub-conscious mind's punishment for what it regards as a transgression. This is not, of course, enough by itself to effect a catharsis, and Harry's remorse remains to torture him. In terms of the

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dramatic symbolism, that is, the Eumenides appear. Later, in the balanced second scene of Part II, Agatha tells Harry of the earlier family history and of the relations between his father and mother. In the light of these revelations Harry perceives that the unhappiness of his marriage, the disposition towards 'murder', is in some sense hereditary and not simply the result of individual, exceptional weakness in himself. His burden of guilt at once begins a metamorphosis. From the negatives of regret, self-mistrust and suffering his attitude shifts round to the positives of repentance and the will to expiate his sin.[2] It is, I think, one of the play's great merits that it so successfully demonstrates how difficult and how far-reaching such a change of attitude may be. Thereafter Harry is free to go on his way—Amy's attempt ('to become a missionary') should warn us that this cannot be paraphrased—

> To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
> A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
> The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
> A care over lives of humble people,
> The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.

'Such things are possible', he adds. And

> It is love and terror
> Of what waits and wants me, and will not let me fall.

* * * *

Such, in outline, is the narrative of the play. It will be appreciated that this is only a basis from which to begin a critical appraisal of the whole. Poetic Drama is in some ways, perhaps, like Programme Music, since in each of these art-forms something relatively abstract and absolute is made to do a menial task. In each case, I would suggest, it is still the generalized references and effects—the poetry, the music—that matter most; and so here. What is important in reading or watching *The Family Reunion* is, in part at least, the sense of the play as an emotional or poetic experience: the sense of being disturbed, confused, lifted as if upon spear-points, and cast down again into the resolution. In part, also,

[2]Compare C. M. Bowra's comment on Oedipus: 'He is not to be condemned for resisting his destiny, but to be admired for accepting it in all its horror and for being ready to work with the god to see that he makes his full amends. He who has been the victim and the sufferer regains the initiative and takes his destiny into his own hands'. (*Sophoclean Tragedy*, p. 185). See also Gilbert Murray's *Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1940) p. 202 *et seq*. Harry, we might say, 'follows' the Furies because he realizes that only in the contemplation of his dead wife's suffering, her state-of-being-wronged, can he see his own sinfulness, and thus reach true humility, and so God. I need hardly add that this play is quite as implicitly 'religious' as is *Murder in the Cathedral* overtly.

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one has to appreciate the texture of thought in the play, the detail with which the original bare idea has been cumulatively invested. It is not the factual *données* of the plot, but the significances and subtleties through which these are made to evolve that matter most. And here one can point out that in this play Eliot has once again succeeded in condensing a theme of the very widest significance into a wieldy and comprehensible unit. I say 'once again' because the technique, operating largely by means of references, invites a comparison, *mutatis mutandis*, with the analogous condensing found in *The Waste Land*, in the minor poems, and in the *Quartets*. There too we find a subject-matter which, while it retains a maximum of implication, is nevertheless reduced to a quintessence.

There are, chiefly, two sorts of reference in *The Family Reunion*: those which make connection with psychological theory, and those which make connection with Greek myths and the Greek tragedies in which the myths were used. Eliot had already experimented with both types (I need only instance the 'Mother mother'[3] term in *Difficulties Of A Statesman* and the Aristophanic-cum-Aeschylean touches about *Sweeney Agonistes*) and in this play he sought to integrate them more fully than hitherto. What was the basis for integration will, I think, be obvious if we remember the use of such a designation as 'Oedipus complex' in psycho-analysis. One of the principal preoccupations of the *Oresteia* (Eliot's most specific 'source') is with the idea of the transmissibility of sin. It is the banquet of Thyestes that leaves a curse upon the house of Agamemnon, and it is under the operation of this curse that Agamemnon commits the impious crime of sacrificing his daughter, Iphigenia. This, in turn, generates a curse—or perhaps rather extends the original—and the consequence is that Clytemnestra kills her husband. This, too, is an impure act, and the cycle proceeds. Granted such a belief in the inexorability of fate it is only by the positing of an intercessionary God that the chain can ever be broken; and looked at in this light the Athena-Apollo deity in the *Eumenides* can be to some extent likened to the Saviour of the New Testament, who taught that God was not only Jehovah—Vengeance and Punishment—but Love and Forgiveness also. This shadowy identity is indeed something which may help us to understand the present play.

Now this idea of the transmissibility of sin, of the visitation of the sins of the fathers upon the children, is very much the case as it is thought still to obtain in the field of mental conflict. 'The child grown up', says the psychologist, 'is the parent in the next generation, and so neurosis is handed on and on'. To put the matter at its simplest level one might perhaps take the example of children whose parents have been divorced. It is common knowledge that, should this occur during the formative years of the children, they generally find it difficult to make a happy marriage

[3]A quotation from *Coriolanus*, V, iii ; but Eliot is, in the poem, quite clearly using it in his own way and for his own purposes.

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for themselves, and indeed have difficulty with most inter-sexual relationships. But one does not want to simplify the point too much.

It is, then, this parallel, in its religious as well as its intellectual implications, that forms the axis upon which *The Family Reunion* is orientated; and the dramatist is, I think, at pains to keep his co-ordinates plain. Continually in the diction there appear phrases that are simply paraphrases of psychological technical terms. Thus we have 'the loop in time' for the paralysis to which neurosis (sometimes literally) gives rise; and, for therapeutic catharsis, a passage like this:

> The chain breaks,
> The wheel stops, and the noise of machinery,
> And the desert is cleared, under the judicial sun
> Of the final eye, and the awful evacuation
> Cleanses.

Even the chauffeur Downing's vague opinion that Harry 'Suffered from what they call a kind of repression' must be taken to be an intentional reference to the Psychology-co-ordinate. On the other hand we have not only the Eumenides but several locutions to remind us of Greek tragedy. Harry's despairing cry about 'the cancer that eats away the self' is surely the λειχῆνας ἐξέσθοντας ἀρχαίαν φύσιν of the *Choephorae*? And, if this is not enough, we have the line,

> Can't you see them? *You* don't see them, but I see them

and the specific reference to 'Argos' to preserve the association with Aeschylus.

Eliot, then, has established a fundamental relation between two religious orientations, two cultures, and he has shown a single abiding constant in both. Not only is the process engrossing and valuable *per se*: it has the added merit that it reinforces his choice of the Greek type of drama as a *milieu* through which to attempt the reinstatement of verse drama in English. Method and content, as it were, coalesce. I do not, naturally, wish to imply by this that the corroboration was, after the choice of a theme, anything less than inevitable; but it is not every poet who is able to attain to this degree of unity and consistency. Plots are not ready-made, even when they are derivative, and opportunities for this sort of congruence cannot arise without a very considerable prior effort in planning and construction. It is often by the quality of sheer intelligence that Eliot surprises most.

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But it is time to return more specifically to the text, and to make some attempt to isolate and evaluate its particular merits and demerits. Though agreement as to what is good and bad in the play is not, I suppose, likely to be general, no-one will presumably wish to deny that it offers grounds both for admiration and for

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something less. I wish first, very briefly, to consider what seem to me its merits; and then, in conclusion and by way of qualification, to make what I take to be the main criticism that must be lodged against it.

The first positive quality to notice, since it is the simplest, is probably the over-all neatness of the construction. As in *Murder In The Cathedral* there are none but the baldest stage-directions—doubtless a reaction from the garrulity of Barrie and Shaw—and this matches the general economy in the writing. 'Insets' to give depth and perspective to what is going on are often of the briefest,[4] and a convention allowing the characters to fall into 'trances' in which they speak their secret thoughts also works admirably in the interests of concentration. At the same time certain recurrent phrases help to give symmetry and stability to the play, holding it together against the centrifugal thrust of the expanding theme. Amy's reference to clocks that may 'stop in the dark', for example, is repeated both at the opening and the end of the play. The re-union is 'a very particular occasion', until at last, with Amy's death, it does indeed become so. Harry's decision ('I must follow the bright angels') is taken up in the refrain of the last chant by Mary and Agatha: 'Follow, follow' And so on. Wishwood is repeatedly called 'a cold place', except for the occasion when Agatha (and Harry, in a different place) remembers 'A summer day of unusual heat for this cold country'. The previous insistence helps, of course, to give the reminiscences the intensity they need. Throughout Part II Harry is given a series of questions about his father; and these, while being as we might say an admirable dramatic device for presenting the subjective process of introspection, also help to build up expectation for Agatha's disclosures, which crown his inquiries at the climax of this part of the play. Most palpable of all, perhaps, is the protracted *George and Margaret* device with the younger brothers, Arthur and John. Continually expected, they never arrive; yet the mere reiteration of their names, with the business occasioned by it, helps sensibly to hold the dialogue and the incidents of the plot together.[5]

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[4]One may instance the Doctor's mention of his first patient, the cancer-sufferer, and the admirable passage in which Downing recalls the night of the drowning.

[5]There are, of course, more substantial reasons for these references to the younger brothers. They are the two sons who have surrendered to their mother's will, thereby earning for themselves the reputation of 'reliability' among the family. To make them miss the reunion which Harry, the runaway, attends, is to comment upon that reliability and so, in an extended fashion, upon the success of their mother's methods. Moreover, there is a parallel between the three sons of each generation, and in this sense John and Arthur are clearly to be identified with, respectively, their uncles Gerald and Charles. Whatever is said about the nephews is accordingly applicable, in part, to the uncles; and thus the device becomes another instrument of economy.

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These—neatness and integration—may seem somewhat formal qualities. Even if we find them so, however, there are others which may be more easily accepted. Consider, for instance, the element of verisimilitude in the play, that is, the touches of authenticity which Eliot has given to the details of his plot. We may find an example of this in Harry's description of the respite he enjoyed after the murder—

> I lay two days in contented drowsiness;
> Then I recovered

—though the precision here is, I think, a little weakened by its being repeated in a later speech by Downing:

> *Charles*: You've looked after his Lordship for over ten years . . .
> *Downing*: Eleven years, Sir, next Lady Day.

One is also impressed by the circumstantiality with which the background of Harry's childhood is made to unfold. The hollow tree, a symbol of freedom and autonomy, the sense of everything being 'referred back to mother', John falling off the pony ('and always on his head'), 'the low conversation of triumphant aunts'—these memories of an unhappy childhood come naturally and convincingly forward. They are all, moreover, apposite, and help to give correct definition to the picture of Harry's present suffering.

Equally fine, in that it shows a dramatist keenly sensitive to the need for at any rate an apparent credibility, is the touch which makes the paragraph about Arthur's accident 'not very conspicuous'. Had is been more prominent we might have wondered why Charles had not noticed it before. Again, and more significantly, there is special sensitiveness, both to theme and characters, manifest in that passage in which the 'murder' is so mildly introduced:

> It was only reversing the senseless direction
> For a momentary rest on the burning wheel
> That cloudless night in the mid-Atlantic
> When I pushed her over.

Harry is allowed to speak casually of the act because the suggestion must be that it is not itself intrinsically important; while, conversely, Violet and the others (the representatives of incomprehension) are made to fasten upon the act alone, not on its causes or consequences. It is the same sensitiveness in the playwright that assigns to Harry just the right tone of coolness and unastonishment when he hears that his father once planned to murder his mother.

> In what way did he wish to murder her ?

One can, so to speak, hear the next question—'By drowning?'—without its being intruded into the text.

As a study in the implications of personal and family relationships the play is, indeed, necessarily concerned with character, and

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this close and analytical observation of the chief protagonists is everywhere apparent. Amy is another case. We are made to see how she has substituted a tie with Wishwood for the lost tie with her husband, and how, through Wishwood, she struggles to retain the love of her sons:

> I keep Wishwood alive
> To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
> To keep me alive, and I live to keep them.

Yet this, too, like the proposed marriage with Mary, never comes off. 'Nothing has been changed,' she says, 'I have seen to that.' And Harry, for whom this arrest has been imposed—perhaps because he is himself a neurotic—at once recognises it as a symptom of neurosis: 'the loop in time,' that is, the wish to linger in the past instead of living forward, into the future. Speaking to Mary he deprecates his mother's attitude:

> It's very unnatural,
> This arresting of the normal change of things:
> But it's very like her. What I might have expected.

Amy is, in sum, the parasite-mother, preying for her life upon the lives of her children, especially Harry. This is why she collapses when she realises that Harry's decisions have passed beyond her control. Wishwood, the family, the whole complex, clock-like organisation has 'stopped in the dark.'[6]

I have said that the main characters are carefully observed. It would be true, on the whole, also to say that this observation is sympathetic—or at least neutral. The characters of the Chorus (Ivy, Violet, Charles, Gerald), on the other hand, are prosecuted with a consistent irony that sometimes comes dangerously close to malice. Charles, deploring the younger generation's proclivities for smoking and drinking, is made simultaneously to help himself to sherry and a cigarette. It is true that Gerald is more subtly ridiculed when he replies:

> You're being very hard on the younger generation.
> I don't come across them very much now, myself;
> But I must say I've met some very decent specimens
> And some first-class shots—better than you were,
> Charles, as I remember.

One might say that this comes near to being what Middleton Murry, speaking of Jane Austen, has called 'a perfect right and left.'[7] But subtlety is the exception here. Violet is given the merciless line, 'I do not seem to be very popular tonight'; and Ivy, with her diagnosis as to the death of Harry's wife ('She may have done it in a fit of temper'), is also brought down to a level of caricature.

* * * *

On a careful reading I think it does indeed become apparent that the treatment of the Chorus offers the first intimation of a

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possible defect in the play. Cognate with it, a sort of obverse of the same limitation, is the note of priggishness often to be found in the speeches of Harry and Agatha. It is irritating time and again to encounter in these the same stilted tone of omniscience, the same assumption of superiority over the other characters:

> Thus with most careful devotion
> Thus with precise attention
> To detail, interfering preparation
> Of that which is already prepared
> Men tighten the knot of confusion
> Into perfect misunderstanding. (*Agatha*)

> . . .I think it is probably going to be useless,
> Or if anything, make matters rather more difficult.
> But talk about it, if you like. (*Harry*)

> It seems a necessary move
> In an unnecessary action
> Not for the good that it will do
> But that nothing may be undone
> On the margin of the impossible. (*Agatha*)

There are, of course, inevitabilities here. One of the play's preoccupations is with a concept of 'consciousness'—awareness, more or less, of the complexity, perilousness, even the horror of life—and Harry and Agatha have to be shown more fully 'conscious' than the lesser characters. At the same time it is unfortunate that the playwright has given them a near-oracular intonation to make this point clear. One does not want Othello, so to speak, to insinuate his own nobility and courage. Even if the device is to be thought of as a convention it still contrasts jarringly with the conversational accents of the Chorus. Frequently, too, it grows monotonous. I have heard a rustle of relief and agreement run through an audience at Violet's.

> This is just what I expected. But if Agatha
> Is going to moralise about it, I shall scream.

---

[6]Only in relation to Amy's death can the play be called a tragedy, and to make that the pivot of the play is manifestly absurd. One might perhaps contrast Ibsen's *Ghosts*, where the tragedy is that of Mrs. Alving, not of her son.

[7]*The Problem of Style*, p. 63. The trick is, of course, part of the usual stock-in-trade of a satirist. A cruder example (*Silas Marner*, Part I, chapter xi) may make it clearer:

> She actually said 'mate' for 'meat', 'appen' for 'perhaps', and 'oss' for 'horse,' which to young ladies living in good Lytherly society, who habitually said 'orse, even in domestic privacy, and only said 'appen' on the right occasions, was necessarily shocking.

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I doubt whether it assists the sympathetic understanding of Harry or Agatha to raise this kind of prejudice against their speech.

There are, then, let us say, uncertainties in the expression which limit its effectiveness. Side by side with the sensitive understanding with which, say, Mary is presented we have these touches of *pompousness in Harry and Agatha* ; and side by side with the excellent dramatic irony that enriches the scene between Harry and Winchell—the adroit play with the ambiguous term, 'her Ladyship' —we have the rather clumsy ironies with which the characters of the Chorus are attacked. An even greater uncertainty (not, I think, unconnected with these former) is to be found if we consider the intensity of Harry's reaction to his 'crime' :

> It's not being alone
> That is the horror—to be alone with the horror.
> What matters is the filthiness. I can clean my skin,
> Purify my life, void my mind,
> But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper . . .
>
> I was like that in a way, so long as I could think
> Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,
> A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe.
> But it begins to seem just part of some huge disaster,
> Some monstrous mistake and aberration
> Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order.
>
> In and out, in an endless drift
> Of shrieking forms in a circular desert
> Weaving with contagion of putrescent embraces
> On dissolving bone.

The accent is quite unmistakable, an accent of naked revulsion. One may query, however, how much it is supported by the play as a whole. For such an accent of despair to be properly subjugated to the facts of the plot there would have, I think, to be something patently unpleasant about the act of murder itself. Otherwise the effect of the play is to attribute Harry's consciousness of 'filthiness' merely to his general hereditary neurosis : which is no more than to say that it is Harry's distress that causes his distress—to make him a lunatic, obsessed. Eliot has written of the attitudes of Pascal and Swift in a paragraph which furnishes a useful commentary here :

> . . .A similar despair (to Pascal's), when it is arrived at by a diseased character or an impure soul, may issue in the most disastrous consequences though with the most superb manifestations; and thus we get *Gulliver's Travels;* but in Pascal we find no such distortion; his despair is in itself more terrible than Swift's, because our heart tells us that it corresponds exactly to the facts and cannot be dismissed as mental disease; but it was also a despair which was a necessary prelude to, and element in, the joy of faith.'

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This, surely, applied to *The Family Reunion,* helps to bring out a very important point. If, that is to say, Harry's 'despair' is disproportionate, then he is (like Swift) subject to 'mental disease'; and, this being so, his acceptance of religious responsibility must be very much closer to regression than to development, a mere evasion of the pitted struggle in his own consciousness. To make Harry a lunatic, in fact, is to destroy the significance of the play. Some fact in the plot, some *point d'appui,* must be found to support his attitude of horror and disgust, and that fact, when found, must provide an *adequate* support. The correspondence of emotion to fact must be preserved.

But the only sufficient support for the despair is, surely, the murder? To attribute Harry's despair to his neurosis is, as I have said, seriously to risk branding him as an irresponsible psychopath; and, in more concrete terms, it is also to locate a prime mover in the play—guilt—outside the compass of 'the facts' as they are presented by the plot. Had the murder been an act in its nature particularly brutal there would obviously have been a very full and valid 'cause' for the fervour of Harry's emotion. But, as we have seen, while being less than compelling in itself (if anything, a push), the act is consistently glossed over—*has* to be glossed over in order to bring out the real significance of the theme. We are left with the picture of a character who, while speaking of 'filthiness' and 'putrescent embraces', can explain these feelings no more satisfactorily than by referring them to

> The accident of a dreaming moment,
> Of a dreaming age, when I was someone else . .

How, one may ask, is this sharp disparity to be explained, and how far does it indicate a defect in the conception of the play?

Inevitably, I would suggest, we are thrown back, for the explanation, upon an earlier observation that I made: namely, that the play is, roughly, a transference of emotion from a personal experience to a fictitious setting. From time to time this transference is, through Harry, almost admitted:

> I am not speaking
> Of my own experience, but trying to give you
> Comparisons in a more familiar medium.

Two experiences are present in the play, and even the phantom presence of the personal experience (it is perhaps not fanciful to equate this with the personal experience represented by *The Waste Land*) is enough to blur the story of Harry, its fictitious equivalent.

Explanation is, however, only half the problem. It yet remains to find some standard by which to gauge the seriousness of this insecurity—to see how far it constitutes a failure in the play. And here we can conveniently go back to the essay on *Hamlet* in *The Sacred Wood.* There, it will be remembered, Eliot makes the point that *Hamlet* must be adjudged an artistic failure because there

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is in it an emotional tone which is not properly supported by the facts of the plot. It is perhaps advisable to quote his own words:

> 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately invoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence[8]. . . .The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion: and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear'.

Here we come, seemingly, to the very heart of the matter. If the objective correlative is 'precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*' it is, equally precisely, what is deficient in *The Family Reunion*. Two forces are pulling in opposite directions. The requirement of the total theme, on one side, demands that the 'murder' should be as nebulous as possible; and, on the other, the ferment of the personal experience requires the murder to be a very real and substantial 'objective correlative'. It cannot, however, be both; and in effect Harry becomes (what Eliot would have us believe Hamlet becomes) no more than a mouthpiece for obsession, disturbing and impairing the play in which he figures. If, in fact, *Hamlet* is to be accounted 'most certainly an artistic failure' then *The Family Reunion* must, I am afraid, be set as low. It is, after all, in that most central of his essays, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, that Eliot has written the truest criticism of this play: I mean that well-known passage where he says that 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'. All the small defects of the play—the rancour towards the Chorus, the occasional hysteria or smugness in Harry's speeches, the general secretiveness—seem to group themselves into one radical deficiency: the lack of what Eliot has taught us to call 'impersonality'. Beyond a doubt there is a failure here, a failure on the part of the poet, a failure that the prescient critic has already diagnosed. One cannot but feel, regretfully, that it is the critic who is right.

JOHN PETER.

---

[8]I may add that examination will also reveal a statement on the matter by Shakespeare himself:

> . . .Our size of sorrow
> Proportion'd to our cause, must be as great
> As that which makes it. (*Antony and Cleopatra IV*, xv, 5-7).

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IN MEMORIAM

W. SCHENK, 1918-1949.

Willy Schenk, who died in June of this year, was an historian of very great promise. His first book, *The Concern for Social Justice in the Puritan Revolution,* was an effective protest against the attribution to the seventeenth-century radicals of modern democratic ideas, and an attempt to place them in the spiritual setting where they belonged; and a forthcoming book on Cardinal Pole is likely to prove a notable contribution to a renewed understanding of English humanism in the sixteenth century. The essay on the 'Cortegiano' and the Civilization of the Renaissance, which appeared in the last number of this journal, may serve as an indication of the kind of history he was interested in writing. But Schenk's qualities as an historian were inseparable from his qualities as a man. The liveliness and good humour of his conversation were the expression of a mind that gave as readily as it received, and in talk with him it was impossible to separate the elements of intellectual stimulus and an indefinable quality of warmth and zest. His personal feeling for spiritual values, in religion, in literature and in music, entered directly into his dealing with the past, and—although an indefatigable worker—his pre-occupation with history was primarily a pre-occupation with the embodiment of those values and their complex living interplay. Born in Czechoslovakia, naturalized in this country, and a Roman Catholic in religion, he combined an unforced sense of 'Europe' with a feeling for the local and particular; and for the abstractions and simplifications made for the sake of some unliving idea he had a good-natured contempt. Those who knew him, as a much loved friend or teacher, will remember him with gratitude.

L.C.K.

CORRESPONDENCE

72, Rowley Avenue,
Sidcup, Kent.

TO THE EDITORS OF *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

I wonder if it will be of interest to readers if I define my inability to see eye to eye with Mr. Schenk in his account of Castiglione's *Courtier* in the June number of *Scrutiny*.

A few quotations are, it seems to me, sufficient to represent his case: 'The *philosophy* of these courtiers, we cannot help concluding, was a lie, sensual pleasure, so far from being despised, was in fact

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the mainspring of their lives' . . . 'the polite and glittering world of Urbino' . . . 'here they (good manners and conviviality) became divorced from life which, after all, is not a *permanent sherry party*. Castiglione's courtier, and Bembo in particular, is the true precursor of a cultural type well-known among the educated classes of our own day: the sophisticated dilettante constantly searching for amusement, as if to conceal from himself and from the world his inner emptiness' . . . 'the culture of Castiglione's Italy tended to remain *esoteric and precious*; its leaders formed, on the whole, an artificial and self-conscious group. *The people have no place at all in the Cortegiano's scheme of things*' . . . 'in Shakespeare we find both: hierarchy and equality; *unlike the Courtiers of Urbino, he refused to be taken in by the pretensions of the gentleman born or made*'.

In my eyes, it is enough to set *one* passage of *The Courtier* against that for refutation.

'It is God therfore that hath appointed the people under the custodie of Princis, which ought to have a diligent care over them, that they make him accompt of it, *as good stewardes do their Lord*, and love them, and thinke their owne all the profit and losse that happeneth to them, and principally above all thing provide for their good estate and welfare. Therfore ought the prince not onely to be good, but also to make others good, *like the Carpenter's square, that is not only straight and just itself, but also maketh straight and just whatsoever it is occupied about*. And the greatest proofe that the Prince is good, is when the people are good: *because the life of the Prince is a lawe and ringleader of the Citizens*, and upon the condicions of him must needes al others depende: neyther it is meete for one that is ignorant, to teache: *nor for him that is out of order, to give order;* nor for him that falleth to help up another. Therfore if the Prince will execute these offices aright, it is requisit that he apply all his studie and diligence to get knowleage, afterward to facion himselfe and observe unchangeablye in everye thinge the lawe of reason, not written in papers, or in metal, but graven in its owne minde, that it may be to him alwayes not onelie familier, but inwarde, and live with him, as a parcell of him: to the intent it may night and day admonish him and speake to him within his hart, *riddinge him of those troublous affections that untemperate mindes feele*'.

The 'moral seriousness' of that is, unless I am mistaken, quite as profound as that of the Elyot passage invoked by Mr. Schenk. (After all, Elyot's *Governor* does owe a great deal to *The Courtier*).

This passage alone is sufficient evidence that Urbino is *not* just a 'polite and glittering world' with no contact with the rest of society. It should be obvious that the *responsibilities* of a nobleman are as keenly felt here as in Elyot or Jonson or any figure of the English Renaissance.

It would seem from Mr. Schenk's essay that 'order' (despite the recurrence of references to Ulysses' great speech) is still not sufficiently understood. Mr. Schenk cites Langland as if his 'world' were apart from Castiglione's: one (it follows) was equalitarian,

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the other hierarchical. But Langland insists on the necessity for 'degree' in terms like that in *The Courtier*. In neither case is the equality of men in the eyes of God in dispute: order—in the shape of a king, nobles and magistrates etc.—exists in order to *ensure* that equality, to ensure justice (See Piers Plowman's remarks to the Knight).

This conception of order is the one obtaining in the time of Hooker, Eliot and Castiglione. This passage I quoted is by no means the only one demonstrating that the people have a place in the Cortegiano's scheme of things.

To turn now to the beginning of the article, in particular the third paragraph—Mr. Schenk sees in Castiglione's 'sprezzatura' nothing more than the understatments of 'The prizemen who never do a stroke of work, the Blues who never do any training', but that is not how the passage in question reads to me: the Courtier should 'eschew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and daungerous rock, *Affectation or Curiosity* and (to speak a new word) to use in every thyng a certain *Reckelesnes* and seeme whatsoever he doeth and sayethe to do it without pain, and (as it were) not myndyng it'. Far from being 'esoteric and precious', 'an artificial and self-conscious group', Castiglione urges a modest deportment, one that shall *not* get things out of proportion or 'put on airs'.

The remarks about the musicians affected and the neglect of Josquin de Près strike me as being a trifle beside the point—along with the account of Bembo's poetry.

In point of fact Mr. Schenk's remarks about the discussion of language in *The Courtier* seem to me the very obverse of the truth. The topic is handled in Book I with deep feeling and reasonableness, and the chief speaker, Count Lewis, stresses the *living* nature of language and deprecates (this is the point) a written language that is out of touch with the spoken word. As regards the 'shadow of sensual beauty', most people are agreed in recognizing the fact that neo-platonism, if it is to mean anything, must *emerge* out of a very real and lively apprehension of the sensual world *before* transcending it. (That is the point of the stairway). What so prejudiced Mr. Schenk against *The Courtier* is difficult quite to see. One wouldn't make extravagant claims for it, but it *is* a fine book: and the gulf between the *ideal* and the *real* of its 'civilization' is nothing like so great as he would have us believe.

Yours sincerely,

I. R. BROWNING.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Dr. Schenk, we know, would have been glad that his essay should have initiated discussion, but unhappily he is no longer alive to carry discussion further.

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To The Editors of *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

I think I was not the only reader to be pleasantly astonished by 'La Bella Bona-Roba', the poem by Lovelace in your last issue, presented for us with very just and able analysis by Mr. Marius Bewley. I am grateful to Mr. Bewley for bringing the poem to our notice, and I am assured of the substantial correctness of his account. I am the more concerned to draw attention to certain implications, incidental to that account, which seem open to question.

After my first readings I endorsed the remark that 'There is a curiously modern flavour about some of the above stanzas (one even thinks vaguely of the American poet, Wallace Stevens . . .)', and that 'Its deceptive modernity is based on the movement of the thought (almost stream-of-consciousness) through the words . . . '. But these are two of the comments which I am now disposed to question. For although Mr. Bewley agrees that the modernity is 'deceptive', the modernity in question appears to be that of Stevens, not necessarily (shall we say) that of Eliot. And it has recently been argued, very plausibly, that to treat seventeenth-century verse as if it were governed by the same intention as the verse of Eliot, is to distort:

> 'This recognition of author's *interpretation* as controlling subject must be distinguished from the modern author's portrayal of his own *process* of interpreting or feeling, of "the very movement of thought in a living mind", the "interplay of perception and reflection" (these phrases come from F. O. Matthiessen's and Edmund Wilson's essays on Eliot). The earlier author's subject was different, however similar his stuff ; his subject was still "his meaning", not "himself-seeing it". One finds the choice of the images made upon different grounds, and their structural function differently affecting their nature, if one reads first Eliot's "Prufrock" and then even a difficult border-line case like Donne's "Elegy XI, Upon the losse of his Mistresses Chaine, for which he made satisfaction". Eliot shows us a man having a thought. Donne arranges the thoughts a man had, upon losing his mistress' property, into a carefully logical and hence wantonly witty exposition of the "bitter" and disproportionate cost of ladies'.[1]

From certain passages of Mr. Bewley's account it seems plain that he cannot subscribe to this distinction between the poet of the seventeenth century, and of the present:

> 'Consider the reflective repetition of "bone" in Stanza I. The slight elevation of tone in the first line is at once brought into intimate touch with the thought as that reflective repetition accurately reproduces the pattern of the thought's operation. The singularity of the opening figure, "skeleton of a poor marmoset", has a strangeness that is acceptable at once because it is so pro-

[1]Rosemond Tuve. University of Chicago Press. 'Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery', p. 43.

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foundly personal. In the hands of a modern poet such a figure would have strong Imagist tendencies as in Stevens's

> "Above the forest of the parakeets
> A parakeet of parakeets prevails,
> A pip of life amid a mort of tails".

But Lovelace's figure is not devised, and it is not artificial, either in our pejorative modern sense or in the Elizabethan sense of a made thing showing craft. It is organic in the poem as a whole, for it is in this opening figure that one strongly feels the whole poem has its origin. Its effects are everywhere, and not least in the magnificent immediacy of the third line. In the second, third, and fourth stanzas the rhythm continues to mirror the activity of the working mind with considerable subtlety, and the terse directness, the "colloquial" spareness of many of the words is effective'.

Of Stanza 5, Mr. Bewley remarks that 'The sinuosities of personal thought are here ironed out in a highly conventional development". But from those 'sinuosities', from the rhythm which 'continues to mirror the activity of the working mind', from the repetition which 'accurately reproduces the pattern of the thought's operation', it is plain that this critic treats Lovelace as showing 'a man having a thought', not as arranging 'the thoughts a man had'. Miss Tuve, one gathers, would have to take issue with Mr. Bewley and argue for the poem as 'artificial . . . in the Elizabethan sense of a made thing showing craft'. Does the poem support Mr. Bewley or Miss Tuve?

To begin with, it seems that the opening figure is not so 'strange', because not so 'profoundly personal', as Mr. Bewley asserts or as it appears upon first sight. From the notes to the Oxford edition of Lovelace (ed. C. H. Wilkinson, 1930) it appears that the series of images, 'monkey-ape-baboon-marmoset', was in common parlance connected with the courtesan, just as 'Bona-Roba' was an accepted euphuism for the same. There remains for the 'skeleton', introduced thus abruptly, some of the personal strangeness. But at least the common reference makes of Lovelace's figure something much less arbitrary and gratuitous than that 'parakeet' of Stevens which at first it so strikingly resembles. Similarly the 'magnificent immediacy' of the third line remains, but slightly blunted, when we realize that the figure 'clothes = flesh' was conventional in Lovelace's period and continually recurrent in his own work (*cf.* for instance, 'To a Lady with child that ask'd an Old Shirt', and 'Love made in the first Ages: To Chloris'). This blunting of the gratuitous element in the first figure leads me to question whether the repetition of 'bone', in the second line, is indeed 'reflective'. 'It now seems, I think, less novel and interesting, sheerly emphatic, not, 'bone, yes, bone', but 'bone upon bone'. The notes, giving the precise meanings, from venery, of 'assay', of 'keeper's fees', of 'rascal deer', give the impression that the third and fourth stanzas are logical stages in an ordered and logical argument. Here,

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says Mr. Bewley, 'the rhythm continues to mirror the activity of the working mind with considerable subtlety'. But it seems to me that between the activity and the mirroring of the activity has occurred a stage in which the activity has been pruned and arranged as strict argument. For the 'Sure' of the third stanza ('Sure it is meant good husbandry in men') carries the sense of 'It is true, I grant you . . . '; and before the fourth stanza we are to supply, as it seems to me, a 'Yet', or a 'But'—'On the other hand . . . '.

I would not deny that on this showing the poem appears less interesting than at first, and I would agree that the considerable distinction which remains to it is admirably defined by Mr. Bewley, in terms of colloquial and conventional diction playing off against each other. But Miss Tuve, I feel, is in the right. In the case of Lovelace, as in that of Donne, we have to do with the thoughts a man has, not with a man having thoughts. And the distinction is not so pedantic as it appears.

Yours sincerely,

St. Catharine's College, Cambridge.

DONALD A. DAVIE.

TO THE EDITORS OF *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

Mr. Davie's objections to my analysis of 'La Bella Bona-Roba' in my recent essay, 'The Colloquial Mode of Byron', raise an interesting problem, and in view of his interpretation of some of my words I am grateful to him for occasioning an opportunity to sharpen and clarify several things I said. On some of the points which Mr. Davie raises I am content to believe we shall remain in final disagreement; some of the others I think can be explained as misinterpretation of what I wrote, but on this score I am willing to accept any blame arising from awkward or faulty presentation, for Mr. Davie's letter makes it clear that he has accorded me the courtesy of a very careful reading indeed.

Before taking up Mr. Davie's more detailed objections, there is one general charge he makes that I would like to refer to at once. So far from equating the modes of seventeenth-century and twentieth-century poetry, I think I was clear in stating a distinction. Mr. Davie quotes me piece-meal as saying: 'There is a curiously modern flavour about some of the above stanzas (one even thinks vaguely of the American poet Wallace Stevens . . .)'. But if Mr. Davie had quoted not merely the first half of that sentence, but the whole sentence, some of the ground of his objection would have been lost, for what I really wrote was: 'There is a curiously modern flavour about some of the above stanzas (one even thinks vaguely of the American poet Wallace Stevens, though he could do nothing as fine), and possibly only then does it become clear how essentially different in structure, and consequently in the quality of delight offered, this poem is from anything that could be written to-day'. My reason for including an analysis of 'La Bella Bona-Roba' in the

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first place was precisely to point to its induplicable Carolinian character. I feel that Mr. Davie somewhat unjustifiably undertakes to restrict the application of my qualifying phrase, 'deceptive modernity', to the poetry of Wallace Stevens alone, thereby leaving him free (presumably on the basis of my phrase, 'almost stream-of-consciousness', which I'll discuss later) to bring Mr. Eliot's poetry into the discussion as if it were I who had introduced it. I mentioned Stevens rather than Eliot because I felt that of all possible contemporary comparisons he was perhaps *nearest* to the seventeenth century, and that a comparison with him would therefore point the difference with telling exactness. If I may presume to quote a sentence of mine from an article on Wallace Stevens which is soon to appear in *Partisan Review*, having mentioned the superficial similarities between his poetry and the seventeenth century, I conclude: 'But a comparison would hardly be fair to him, for it would tend to show how much better off they were than we, both in the concrete immediacy of their language [Miss Tuve might object to this] and in the controlled precision of their abstractions'.

But I appreciate the confusion that my phrases 'almost stream-of-consciousness' and 'sinuosities of personal thought' may have caused when applied to 'La Bella Bona-Roba'. I naturally value Miss Tuve's work, and there is no doubt that a seventeenth-century poem cannot be read as a twentieth-century poem; but I think there is equally no doubt that a twentieth-century reader, with whatever scholarly apparatus, cannot read a seventeenth-century poem as its first readers did. Even if he could, I think it would be highly undesirable to do so, unless he were willing to devitalize utterly our concept of a living tradition. The impossibility of bridging the time gap seems to me to be admirably illustrated by Mr. Davie's insistence on the distinction between a man having a thought and the thought a man had. There is certainly a large proximate validity to this distinction, and Miss Tuve has proved that it can have a limited value critically, but in the end the dichotomy proves illusory. The subject is too large to be discussed in a letter with any effectiveness, and I do not feel much inclined to devote myself to a study of Miss Tuve's rather formidable work with that intensity which would justify capsuling one's disagreements in a few neat formulations. But if a man 'arranges' his thoughts, I hardly know what synonym a man might offer for 'arrangement' except 'thought' also. However successfully Miss Tuve herself may step over the trap in long series of distinctions and qualifications that make her book, for me at least, arduous reading, the twentieth-century reader can hardly keep the fact steadily or significantly in view that logical constructions were the easy and natural mode of operation for a civilization brought up on centuries of scholastic thinking. However differently the Elizabethans may have defined 'artificial', we ourselves lack the courage to apply that term *in any sense* to our own highly conventional forms of stream-of-consciousness and automatic writing. We rather fondly imagine I think (although I doubt if I shall find much agreement) that our own forms reveal the very

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bare bones of consciousness and the deep interiors of the personality. But in hands like Henry Miller's, say, they are more destitute of vitality and naturalness than *Euphues*. The seventeenth- and twentieth-century modes of poetry are perfectly distinct from each other, but it is our excited sense of the personal force of the poet coming through his own particular mode by which we gauge the value of any poem, then or now. When I called 'La Bella Bona-Roba' 'almost stream-of-consciousness' I used a term to which to-day we are much inclined to attribute naturalness and directness; I had hoped to suggest thereby that Lovelace, in a quite other mode, was also achieving a great personal immediacy of expression, and that we should try to *read through* the conventional surfaces of the poem to its real value in a way we find it so easy to do when dealing with our own conventions of form. I do not think that the difficulty of reading seventeenth-century poetry well derives from the fact that we ignore the differences; despite Miss Tuve's alarm, I think it still comes from the fact that we shall always find it difficult to see how much two such different modes can have in common. I think that it is in this common ground, after all the distinctions have been made, that the ultimate critical judgment must occur. And my objection to Mr. Davie's insistence on the distinction between a man's thought and a man having thoughts is simply that it minimizes that common ground unnecessarily.

In taking 'La Bella Bona-Roba' as an example of a convention-filled Carolinian poem, chosen to illustrate a quite other point in a different argument, I did not think it necessary to discuss its logical construction in any detail. Mr. Davie is, of course, perfectly correct in saying the middle stanzas exhibit an argument, and that ' "Sure" of the third stanza carries the sense of "It is true, I grant you . . . " '. But we were aware of this from its most famous use as a logical nexus in Hamlet's soliloquy, 'How all occasions do inform against me'. And I would point to this soliloquy as a good example of how, in the seventeenth century, 'the sinuosities of personal thought' could find a natural mode of expression through a logical order that was native to them, but which is alien to us.

Turning now to Mr. Davie's particular objections to my reading of 'La Bella Bona-Roba', I think I had better present a detailed analysis of what the poem seems to mean, for I am convinced that unless we read it, from one point of view, as the poem of *a man having a thought* we shall not be able, despite its elaborate logic, to know what thought the man has had; and this, I believe, is an index to its profoundly personal character. But first I had better discuss what I mean by 'personal'. It appears that the question, Can a poet's image simultaneously participate in a common conventional currency and the personal feelings of the poet?—would be answered in different ways by Mr. Davie and myself. Before considering the marmoset image, I think one might, with the effect of greater detachment, glance at an analogous image. I suppose that Mr. Davie would grant that the cormorant was an even more widely used image in seventeenth-century poetry than the 'monkey-

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ape-baboon-marmoset' series of images. A typical instance of its use occurs in Dryden's *Conquest of Granada, Part I*:

> You like some greedy cormorant devour
> All my whole life can give you in an hour.

No one would maintain that this is distinguished verse, or that Dryden drew very deeply on his sensibility in making such an image. Yet Marvell could write something strangely similar, exhibiting quite as high a conventional content, and make it exquisitely personal:

> Now let us sport us while we may;
> And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
> Rather at once our Time devour,
> Than languish in his slow-chapt power.

I find Marvell's image everything Dryden's is not: immediate, personally urgent, and sensuously vivid: not, indeed, for any one sense, but in the imagination where all the senses merge in a composite unity. This is not, of course, 'personal' in the way that some romantic poetry is, but I should be most inclined to take issue with Mr. Davie when he invokes the terms 'gratuitous' and 'arbitrary' as significant notes of the personal.

But to come to 'La Bella Bona-Roba': this poem seems to be a radical criticism of the conventionally wanton ethics of love that prevailed at the earlier Stuart Court, and which reached full flowering later in writers like Sir George Etherege and the Earl of Rochester. We only possess the stark outlines of Lovelace's career, but we know well enough that his experience of the milieu was immediate and protracted. The sentiments of most of his verse are representative of the fashion, but this poem is one of the occasions on which he seems to have had a sharp personal reaction. The first stanza begins by falling back on the seventeenth-century concern with death and progressive decay. The current belief that the world was in a cycle of deterioration, moving from a remote Golden Age towards an impending dissolution, was an implicit assumption behind such a poem as, say, Lovelace's 'Love Made in the First Age', where the theme is stated with conventional effectiveness, and in which decay and love are joined. The conjunction, I grant, is not unusual for the time; nevertheless I find the opening image of 'La Bella Bona-Roba' strange and personal, for the image of illicit erotic experience (the marmoset) is instantaneously and grotesquely transformed into a momento mori (the skeleton). Since a momento mori is an object for meditation, it still seems to me that the repeated 'bone' of the first stanza is meant to be a reflective repetition. There is a meditative withdrawal and shudder on the poet's part reflected in that repetition, and it is emphasized by his knowledge that he is almost alone in his reaction. The opening, 'I cannot tell who loves . . . ' probably means, 'I cannot measure or count the multitude . . . '; or it may even mean, 'I cannot confess the following sentiments to my usual type of companion'. In such a reading the unusual grammatical compression, by no means a typical

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practice, causes the thought and phrasing to impinge with great directness on each other. If we were to read the sentence as a simple confession of unperspicaceous ignorance it would be a very unconventional performance for a Carolinian courtier indeed. In the third line Lovelace begins to dissociate himself from the popular attitude. 'Give me a nakedness with her clothes on' has an immediacy in no way blunted by the fact that skin and clothes images were common in the seventeenth century. (Despite Mr. Davie's implication to the contrary, I pointed out in my article that 'white satin upper coat of skin' was a convention: I could hardly have done more). The immediacy resides in the near-personification of 'a nakedness', a quality divorced from its subject and standing up in its own right, a self-existent entity. This immediacy is pressed home when one realizes the economy with which Lovelace is making an unusually complex statement in a minimum of words, and using conventional images for his own personal meaning. No contrast is intended between clothes and skin, for they are plainly identical. What Lovelace is asking for is a nakedness (physical love) that doesn't end with decay and death—that has no skeleton within—but which offers profounder fulfilment, which he symbolizes in the image of an interior nakedness replacing the skeleton, and hence triumphing over the momento mori of the opening figure. The second stanza relates to the enlarged physical appetites and capacities that characterized the men of the Golden Age, and which Lovelace describes in 'Love Made in the First Age'; and one might almost wonder if Lovelace were not simply regretting his own sensual limitations. But the appetites of the Golden Age were the reward of incorruption, and the third stanza of 'La Bella Bona-Roba' presents the desired fulfilment in terms of marriage, which it contrasts with the wasteful illicit love of stanzas 1 and 4. The man who establishes himself in marriage, consorting with a *single* love (Aery leane) rather than with a flock of loves, repairs the damage inflicted on him in Eden, and is a complete person again. But the rake has none of these satisfactions, and is left with expenses and penalties as his reward. In the closing stanza the 'rascal deer', or lean deer that must be passed over, relate to the skeleton of the opening line, and 'the largest doe' relates to the fleshly ideal body of the second stanza.

Now this seems to me the correct interpretation, but the meaning (*the thought Lovelace had*) is clear only because it is possible to arrive at it by watching Lovelace *have the thought*, in the process of which we sense the deeply personal feeling that is involved. It is easy to read this poem in an exactly opposite sense from the one I have given here. In such a reading, the successive nakednesses in the second stanza would be interpreted as a salute to carnal pleasure only. The 'Sure it is meant . . . ' of the third stanza would be read with an ironic inflection, and 'Aery leane' could then be interpreted, not as an Aery with a single falcon, but as an impoverished nest. In this reading, stanza 4 would become a description of the rewards that await fatuous husbands, and 'rascal deer' would be

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husband-seeking ladies interchangeable with the momento mori of stanza 1. Instead of making a moral judgment on the manners of his age, Lovelace in such an interpretation, would appear to be making as severe an indictment of marriage as one could, equating it with living death.

It seems to me that both of these readings take due cognizance of seventeenth-century poetic and logical conventions. But elaborately extensive ambiguity of this kind can hardly be included as one of those conventions, and in any case the poem, in either reading, does not have the air of playing this sort of trick. I think, then, that the only guide we have to *which* of the two interpretations Lovelace intended will lie in discovering on which side the personal quality of his images and rhythm seems most intense and interesting, on which side the movement of the argument seems most intimately and sinuously to reflect the movement of his own mind as he develops that argument; and the reader can prove for himself how the quality changes on successive readings as one passes from one interpretation to the other. He can prove for himself how the quality *deteriorates* when he reads it with the second meaning in mind. The first interpretation, aligning itself with seventeenth-century melancholy—that melancholy consciousness that an age was dying and that a new one might not be born—imparts a seriousness to the whole poem which it loses entirely in the cheap conventional cynicism of the second reading. For example, consider stanza 4. According to the first interpretation, the huntsman is an impressive symbol of metaphysical restlessness whose keeper (suggesting a Divine Judge) will impose formidable sanctions for transgressions. According to the second reading the huntsman is a contemptible figure not wily enough to remain uncaught, and the keeper becomes his shrew of a wife. This reading completely desensitizes the rhythm, for since the flexible colloquial line enforces the deeper personal meaning one must, on the second interpretation, try to ignore the rhythm entirely and concentrate on the static presence of rhetorical conventions in the poem, which then loses its distinction and sinks down to the level of, say, Suckling.

I have no quarrel with the distinction which Mr. Davie takes over from Miss Tuve if it is very tentatively used, but I do not think it can be enlarged into a critical principle of deep validity, and I would not subscribe to any attempt to do so. The attempt itself appears to me to be an encroachment by scholarship on the proper grounds of criticism, but in saying this I certainly do not wish to appear ungracious on the subject of scholarship. The boundary between the two cannot be rigidly defined, but it is extremely important that we should attempt to keep it roughly in view. Such an exchange as Mr. Davie has invited helps—at least I am sure it helps the writers clarify their own attitudes—and in closing I have to thank Mr. Davie once more for raising the question, and for pointing to certain phrases in my own article which, in the interests of clarity, seem to call for emendation.

Yours sincerely,

New York City,
U.S.A.

MARIUS BEWLEY.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

KEYNES, LAWRENCE AND CAMBRIDGE

TWO MEMOIRS, by J. M. Keynes, introduced by David Garnett (*Rupert Hart-Davis*, 7/6).

For the repugnance felt by Lawrence towards Mr. David Garnett's friends, and the Cambridge-Bloomsbury milieu in general, Mr. Garnett has a simple explanation; jealousy. 'He was a prophet who hated all those whose creeds protected them from ever becoming his disciples'. That Lawrence had gifts Mr. Garnett readily perceived. In fact, he has 'never met a writer who appeared to have such genius. I greatly admired, and still admire, his short stories, his poems and several of his novels, particularly his first novel, *The White Peacock*'. (So, by way of paying one's tribute to James, one might say: 'Yes, tremendous! I particularly admire *The American*'. Or, a greater genius being in question: 'I particularly admire *Two Gentlemen of Verona*'). 'But', Mr. Garnett continues,

> 'I was a rationalist and a scientist, and I was repelled by his intuitive and dogmatic philosophy, whereas the ideas of my friends from Cambridge interested and attracted me.
>
> 'It was thus inevitable that sooner or later Lawrence would spew me out of his mouth, since I could never take his philosophy seriously'.

Keynes too, attempting his own explanation, invokes jealousy. But he feels that more is needed. His Memoir (the second of the pair that Mr. Garnett introduces) is a piece of retrospective self-searching in which he asks whether he and his friends may not have provided Lawrence with some valid grounds for judging them adversely. Keynes, no one will question, was a distinguished mind, and the distinction is there, perhaps, in the very effort at self-criticism and a due humility. But the significance of what he offers is not what he is conscious of; it lies in the inadequacy of the effort, and in the justification he brings Lawrence when he least intends it, or suspects it.

The virtually intact complacency he exposes to our view gives us, at the outset, the assumptions on which the inquiry is to proceed: 'But when all that has been said, was there something true and right in what Lawrence felt?' The 'but' leaves the assumptions with us as implicitly granted, following as it does on this:

> 'Lawrence was jealous of the other lot; and Cambridge rationalism and cynicism, then at their height, were, of course, repulsive to him. Bertie gave him what must have been, I think, his first

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glimpse of Cambridge. It overwhelmed, attracted and repulsed him—which was the other emotional disturbance. It was obviously a civilization, and not less obviously uncomfortable and unattainable for him—very repulsive and very attractive'.

'It was obviously a civilization'—shocked as the provincial and puritanical Lawrence must inevitably have been, he 'obviously' can't but have admired and envied. That Lawrence, judging out of his experience of something incomparably more worthy to be called a 'civilization', loathed and despised what was in front of him merely because he saw just what it was is inconceivable to Keynes.

The Memoir is devoted to explaining the serious substance underlying the 'brittle stuff' of the conversation in which Lawrence couldn't be brought to join. Such 'brittle stuff' continued, even in the maturer years of the *élite,* to be a large part of the 'civilization' —at least one gathers so from the way in which Keynes (it is 1938) announces his theme :

> 'if it will not shock the Club too much, I should like in this contribution to its proceedings to introduce for once mental or spiritual, instead of sexual, adventures, to try and recall the principal impacts on one's virgin mind and to wonder how it has all turned out, and whether one still holds by that youthful religion'.

The 'religion' was derived from G. E. Moore, and the Memoir is largely taken up with describing his influence. 'Influence' here, of course, means what was made of him, not in any field of disciplined study, but at the level of undergraduate 'civilization'. That Moore himself deserves the high terms in which Keynes speaks of him no one will wish to question. But the 'influence'—I well remember the exasperated despair with which its manifestations (in mild forms, I now see) filled me when I met them, just after the 1914 war, in friendly seniors who had been formed in that climate at the beginning of the century. Keynes looking back, describes the intellectualities of the coterie and its religion with a certain amused irony; but it is not the detached irony of a mature valuation. In 1938 he still takes them seriously; he sees them, not as illustrating a familiar undergraduate phase which should in any case be left behind as soon as possible, and which the most intelligent men should escape, but as serious and admirable—even, it would seem, when cultivated well beyond undergraduate years. And that is what seems to me most significant in the Memoir, and most revelatory of the Cambridge-Bloomsbury ethos.

Of course, Keynes criticises the 'religion' for deficiencies and errors. But he can't see that, 'seriously' as it took itself, to be inimical to the development of any real seriousness was its essence. Articulateness and unreality cultivated together; callowness disguised from itself in articulateness; conceit casing itself safely in a confirmed sense of high sophistication; the uncertainty as to whether

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one is serious or not taking itself for ironic poise: who has not at some time observed the process?

> 'It did not prevent us from laughing most of the time and we enjoyed supreme self-confidence, superiority and contempt towards all the rest of the unconverted world'.

> 'Broadly speaking we all knew for certain what were good states of mind and that they consisted in communion with objects of love, beauty and truth'.

And Keynes describes the dialectical play ('It was a stringent education in dialectic', he tells us) that was to merge into, and, one gathers, was ultimately superseded by, the more 'brittle stuff'—describes it whimsically, but without in the least realizing that what he and his friends were illustrating was the power of an ancient university, in some of its climatic pockets, to arrest development, and that what they were finding in their intellectual performances was *sanction and reinforcement for an undergraduate immaturity*: the more confident they grew in their sophistication, the less chance had they of discovering what seriousness was like.

The more worldly sophistication that Lawrence encountered in 1914 was not a more genuine maturity. One can readily imagine how the incontinently flippant talk and the shiny complacency, snub-proof in its obtuse completeness, infuriated him. He loathed the flippancy, not because he was an inexperienced prude, but for quite opposite reasons. He had been formed in a working-class culture, in which intellectual interests were bound up with the social life of home and chapel, and never out of touch with the daily business of ensuring the supply of the daily bread. The intellectual interests were not the less real for that: E. T.'s *D. H. Lawrence*, taken together with *Sons and Lovers*, shows what an intense cultivation they had enjoyed during the formative years at Eastwood and Nottingham. Nothing could be more ludicrously wide of the mark than the assumption that Lawrence must have felt inferior and ill-educated when introduced in Russell's rooms to the dazzling civilization of Cambridge. But the thing to stress is his enormous advantage in experience. The young ex-elementary school-teacher was in a position to judge of the most distinguished intellectual among his friends, as he does in a letter of a year or so later:

> 'What ails Russell is, in matters of life and emotion, the inexperience of youth . . . It isn't that life has been too much for him, but too little'.

Keynes, looking back, does of course criticize the 'religion' for certain defects that fall under inexperience. He says that, in its account of human nature, it ignored the formidable part of the irrational forces, and ignored at the same time 'certain powerful and valuable springs of feeling'. But his criticisms have a way of not being able to realize the weight they ought to carry and the

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depth to which they ought to strike. 'We lacked reverence, as Lawrence observed . . .' : Keynes endorses, as he thinks, this radical criticism. But what it means to him is just this and no more (damaging enough by itself, of course) :

> 'We had no respect for traditional wisdom or the restraints of custom . . . It did not occur to any of us to respect the extraordinary accomplishment of our predecessors in the ordering of life (as it now seems to me to have been) or the elaborate framework they had devised to protect this order'.

How little Keynes can understand the full force of Lawrence's criticism he shows when he explains what he calls the 'individualism of our philosophy'.

> 'Now what we got from Moore was by no means entirely what he offered us. He had one foot on the threshold of the new heaven, but the other foot in Sidgwick and the Benthamite calculus and the general rules of correct behaviour. We accepted Moore's religion, so to speak, and discarded his morals'.

> '. . . we were amongst the first of our generation, perhaps alone amongst our generation, to escape from the Benthamite tradition. In practice, of course, . . . the outside world was not forgotten or forsworn'.

> 'Moreover, it was this escape from Bentham, joined with the unsurpassable individualism of our philosophy, which has served to protect the whole lot of us from the final *reductio ad absurdum* of Benthamism known as Marxism . . . But we ourselves have remained . . . altogether immune from the virus, as safe in the citadel of our ultimate faith as the Pope of Rome in his'.

These extracts illustrate how seriously Keynes takes the 'civilization' that must, he is sure, have impressed the 'ignorant, jealous, irritable' Lawrence. The 'unsurpassable individualism of our philosophy'—call the ethos evoked in the Memoir *that,* while granting that the 'philosophy' had weaknesses, and it becomes possible for Keynes to conclude that 'this religion of ours was a very good one to grow up under'. And it becomes possible for him to suggest that the Club-members would have been more subject to the infection of Marxism if they had been at all seriously affected by the spirit of Sidgwick. But what Lawrence heard (and Keynes unwittingly bears him out) was the levity of so many petty egos, each primed with conscious clevernesses and hardened in self-approval :

> 'they'talk endlessly, but endlessly—and never, never a good thing said. They are cased each in a hard little shell of his own and out of this they talk words. There is never for one second any outgoing of feeling and no reverence, not a crumb or grain of reverence : I cannot stand it .

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The kind of triviality that Lawrence describes here is indeed a worse thing than Keynes was able to conceive it. And the significant fact that emerges unmistakably from the Memoir is that he couldn't really grasp the intention of the criticism he was considering. It is a fact that would seem substantially to confirm Lawrence.

If this judgment seems too severe, let it be remembered that the 'civilization' celebrated by Keynes produced Lytton Strachey, and that the literary world dominated by that 'civilization' made Lytton Strachey a living Master and a prevailing influence. And if I should seem to be making too much here of facts belonging to the history of taste and literary fashion, I suggest a pondering of these comments which I take from a review by Sir Charles Webster (he is dealing at the moment with the other of the two memoirs in Keynes's book):

> 'Keynes let me read it in 1943, and its facts were then checked against the documents which record—in very different prose—the public incidents which it relates. They were accurate enough, as I told him at the time. But the details were of course selected and distorted to suit his purpose'.
>
> 'These characterisations are of course caricatures. Keynes put down what suited his purpose at the moment. In this ruthless sacrifice of truth to literary purpose he was obviously much influenced by Lytton Strachey, whose popular books depended on little else. The political caricatures of the *Economic Consequences* did as much harm as the economic insight did good'.

Keynes was a great representative Cambridge man of his time. Cambridge produced him, as it produced the 'civilization' with which he associated himself and which exercised so strong a sway over the metropolitan centres of taste and fashion. Can we imagine Sidgwick or Leslie Stephen or Maitland being influenced by, or interested in, the equivalent of Lytton Strachey? By what steps, and by the operation of what causes, did so great a change come over Cambridge in so comparatively short a time? These are the questions that we find ourselves once more asking as we put down Keynes's little book. The inquiry into which the second would lead if seriously pursued would tell us about a great deal more than Cambridge. That is a reason for thinking it very much worth undertaking.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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THE CULT OF DYLAN THOMAS

DYLAN THOMAS, by Henry Treece (Lindsay Drummond, 7/6).

Nothing has been more irritating about the vogue for Dylan Thomas's poetry than the apparent inability of his admirers to explain their enthusiasm. All sorts of unlikely people were, one gathered, swept off their feet by it, but no intelligible account of the experience emerged, much less anything that could be called reasoned analysis. Now Mr. Treece has given us, according to his publishers, 'the first full-sized work on the poetry of Dylan Thomas to be published in England or the United States of America'. It cannot be said that the result is either enlightening or convincing.

In the first place the book suffers from a lack of unity. Bits of it have appeared earlier in periodicals and elsewhere, and it is obvious that different parts were written at different times. The section dealing with *Deaths and Entrances*, a book now three years old, seems to have been added at the last minute. It is perhaps partly the effect of this lack of unity that Mr. Treece's final estimate of Thomas should seem rather confused: what is presumably intended as an effort to discriminate among the poems often looks like self-contradiction. However, the real trouble is an equal innocence of standards and of critical method. Mr. Eliot, for example, might never have written a line of criticism for all the benefit it has been to Mr. Treece (though he quotes from it occasionally): it is as if a Georgian poet had suddenly been projected into the later 'thirties and fed on a diet of Freud and surrealism. He appears to think that to object to a poem on the ground of incoherence can only mean that one is asking for the simplest paraphrasable prose sense: any idea of imaginative coherence and emotional order would seem to be beyond him. This naivete about meaning lies behind a good deal of contemporary writing, but it is seldom stated so clearly as here:

> '. . . for artistic purposes, which require a peculiar use of language, "meaning" should be dependent on recognition of Pattern, and on any excitement, emotional or intellectual, of colour, sound or shape, which carries with it a satisfaction, or an inner fusion'.

The quality of the satisfaction apparently doesn't matter. Nor need the poet bother much about communication:

> '. . . it is probably the case that those readers who derive little satisfaction from any particular poet are living under different compulsions from that poet. Their problems are not his, and in consequence, they may not fully realize what he is about. Then again, it is likely that every reader "writes" the poem he wishes to read; or in other words, sees in a poem what he wants to see, not necessarily that which the poet most wanted to write'.

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Again, Mr. Treece seems to think it doesn't matter. He seems to have no conception of the poem as in some sense a public fact, a resultant of different personal interpretations. Thomas's poems, he tells us, 'stand or fall by the coincidence at the time of writing with a similar mood or emotion on the part of the reader'. Most of these quotations come from the chapter on 'General Characteristics', which ends with a note that Thomas is often 'unrepentantly directionless' and adds the significant comment: 'That is how it is; and in a cultural tradition, such as ours, of indefinite laxity, how it should be'. We have moved a long way from Lawrence's 'Thank God I'm not free, any more than a rooted tree is free'.

After such a frank abandonment of standards, the rest of the book is something of a damp squib, for the newest criticism links up uncommonly easily with the clichés of romanticism and the dullest academic chatter about Form. Mr. Treece begins by asserting the rights of individual against collective myth: the latter he considers chiefly in the form of mechanistic ideology and finds it more dangerous to the artist than the former. The dangers of the subjective writer he thinks comparatively simple and avoidable, illustrating them from surrealist poetry. After the outline of Thomas's general characteristics there follows a discussion of influences, a motley collection indeed—Hopkins, Hart Crane, Swinburne, Rimbaud, Francis Thompson. A chapter on the debt to Hopkins is devoted partly to a mechanical and external note on common technical devices, partly to a rather vague comparison of the elements of 'inquiry and a terror of fearful expectation' in the two poets (the phrase comes from Charles Williams's introduction). There is no hint of the contrast in organization and discipline of feeling behind the words of the two poets. Similarly the chapter on Thomas the Mediaevalist is partly dubious generalization about 'the beautiful and dark conceptions of mysticism and introspection', partly academic notes on the use of alliterative patterns, Anglo-Saxon metres and Welsh *cywydd* and *cynghanedd*[1] quite unrelated to any expressive function.

The actual survey of Thomas's work begins with a note on his 'straight' poems, rather quaintly defensive and embarrassed in tone. These are not, it is true, especially outstanding or dis-

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[1]Mr. Treece's reliability on these grounds may perhaps be gauged from his statement that *cywydd*, with its rhyming of accented and unaccented syllables, is illustrated in

> Then to Sylvia let us sing
> For Sylvia is excelling

—lines which in their context, of course, make no pretence of rhyming together. He is in several places somewhat approximate about matters of fact, as when he says, outlining the state of the literary world in 1934, that D. H. Lawrence 'wasn't to publish *Pornography and So On* for two years'.

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tinguished, but they have at least the merit of coherence and honesty. On the significance of *18 Poems* Mr. Treece can let himself go. Most of them, we learn, are concerned with pre-natal experience, giving voices to the glands and the nerves: they are praised as a notable extension of the subject-matter of poetry, and we hear of their 'magic and foetal unity'. *25 Poems* is seen as 'a rather slipshod marking time', but *The Map of Love* as an important step forward. Mr. Treece's descriptions will seem to many to be constantly giving away his critical case, as when he says that Thomas's personality is 'by turns arrogant and self-pitying, tender and wildly rhetorical: it is never relaxed and unselfconscious . . .' In the chapter on the latest work Thomas emerges as the leader of the new romanticism, and again the account runs chiefly to vague discussions about subject-matter followed by jejune descriptions of formal and technical experiments. But on *Deaths and Entrances* Mr. Treece is far less enthusiastic than many of the reviewers: in all fairness it must be said that he does try to discriminate, but his critical equipment is so inadequate that the result is not particularly helpful. His final estimate seems to be that 'Dylan Thomas is not a major poet because he is not yet a fully-realized man', but he still has hopes, and partisans will be able to find many passages of less guarded praise.

No doubt it is hardly fair to judge a poet by the pronouncements of his advocates, but it cannot be altogether without significance that on the rare occasions when a critic with standards brings himself to consider Thomas's work carefully and closely he tends to report with very limited enthusiasm. The parallel comments in *The Critic* a year or two ago by Miss Sitwell and Mr. Henry Gibson were very revealing: Miss Sitwell seemed to be not so much reading as making up her own poems and reflecting on literature in general. Mr. Treece's book is at least some slight improvement on that. Perhaps at this point the reviewer should make his own attitude explicit. Let me say then that after tackling Thomas's poetry at various phases of his development and making a special effort over *Deaths and Entrances* I can see very little of positive achievement, though I am ready to be convinced by any critic who will point out to me what I have missed. His work shows undoubted poetic gift, but a complete lack of organization and discipline. The much-vaunted romantic subjectivism looks for the most part like an excuse to avoid the trouble of precise communication. Of course, if Mr. Treece is right, communication doesn't matter, except to that fit audience though few with similar compulsions, and some of the poet's own comments on his work seem to tend the same way. One can only insist that the vivid symbolization of personal conflicts does not by itself constitute art. 'Stephen Spender', says Mr. Treece, 'will appeal to many who like pleasant sounds and new high-lights on old pictures; but Dylan Thomas will be the meat of the man whose primitive wonder, newly awakened, demands a fresh, if unbalanced, world in which he may declare his own dreams unselfconsciously'. If these are really the

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alternatives it won't be merely the literary equivalents of the President of the Royal Academy who decide to keep their money in their pockets.

R. G. Cox.

MR. TURNELL'S CRITICISM

THE CLASSICAL MOMENT, by Martin Turnell (Hamish Hamilton, 12/6).

To one reader of *Scrutiny* at least the announcement of *The Classical Moment* aroused feelings of pleasurable anticipation. One remembered what stimulating, if sometimes controversial reading Mr. Turnell's studies of the French Classical dramatists had supplied. With its introduction on the Seventeenth Century, its Epilogue, little redrafting but a number of additions what sort of a book does it make? Frankly not as good as I had hoped. Mr. Turnell brings a freshness of mind to bear on Corneille, Molière and Racine for which one must be grateful; and his examination of scenes and characters—the detailed appreciation of them—is sometimes full of insight. One feels at first sight, that this is indeed the book to thrust into the hands of the young, one to arouse an intelligent and well-directed enthusiasm in these three dramatists who have so often suffered from the fly-blown annotation of the school edition in which one once read them. All these virtues have been recognized in the many favourable reviews which *The Classical Moment* has received.

To one who is ' in the trade ' Mr. Turnell's book is even something of a challenge. It is the sort of book which one of our professors of French ought to have written and there are some certainly who would not have written anything as readable. As it is, Turnell's *Classical Moment* is already being widely read by undergraduates, but even those who are prepared to recommend it, and (to judge by one or two recent conversations in different Universities) those who read it, are not unconscious of how much of it is questionable.[1] The more I study it the more unequal does it appear in my eyes.

The title chosen is in itself revealing—a useful counter-blast to the more familiar ' classical age.' It is characteristic of a ' classical ' period to think of itself as stable, as established, a high plateau at last attained and stretching on ahead without declivity or descent. Even a nodding familiarity with the French Seventeenth Century soon leads to the realization that what seemed an ' age ' was only a brief twenty-five to thirty years, not *le siècle de Louis Quatorze*

[1]The incidental ' irresponsibilities ' of the author are too frequent. For example we are told on p. 21 that Pascal and Bossuet were both admirers of the Cartesian system. In point of fact, they are just those whose criticism of Descartes and the implications of his system were most forthright.

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but the earlier years of his personal reign. In this volume however the moment runs some danger of dissolving into a mathematical point—identifiable, in Mr. Turnell's final analysis, with the appearance of *Le Misanthrope* in 1666 (p. 46). Accordingly Corneille's generation represents the Age of Honour, Molière's the Age of Reason and Racine's the Age of Passion. Too much of *The Classical Moment* is devoted to the elaboration of concepts of this kind and to an attempted evaluation of these dramatists as the expression of three phases in the life of French society. This treatment is often valid, though less novel than some English readers may imagine, but over it hovers the disquieting shadow of what might be called an unconscious Marxism.

Thus we are told that Corneille's heroes are ' the embodiment of all that was best in the middle classes from which the poet came' (p. 22)—and, rather inconsistently, on p. 38 that Felix in *Polyeucte* and Prusias in *Nicomède* are the means of making ' the essential criticism of middle-class complacency.' Such comments (and there are many more in the same vein) seem, to me at least, almost nonsensical. Similarly if Molière's early *Don Garcie de Navarre* has no success, it is, Mr. Turnell appears to claim on p. 46, because the public were not ripe for it. It is at least as plausible to hold, with most writers, that Molière had not yet ' found himself ' and had embarked on the kind of play for which he was temperamentally unsuited.

Mr. Turnell is indeed so intent on relating his three figures to their age that he forgets throughout his book that dramatic technique and tradition have a determining influence on even the greatest of playwrights. In almost a hundred pages devoted to Molière there is but one brief reference to the incalculable influence of the *Commedia dell' Arte* from which the formula of the *monomaniac*, the technique of characterization, and consequently the very shape and much of the flavour of Molière's Comedies are derived. This in turn leads him to assert that Molière's characters are in no sense caricatures ' (p. 64). Of course, they are caricatures ; that is why they make us laugh. They are caricatures in every sense except one, namely that their creator has drawn them with a sufficiency of subtle incidental detail to keep them alive. No doubt, Mr. Turnell would not dissent. Yet the remark is typical of the loose way in which some of this book is written.

This disregard for dramatic technique, this endeavour to consider the play as a mere sociological document is still more glaring in the case of Racine. Mr. Turnell is convinced that these tragedies directly reflect a certain moral decadence of the France of Louis XIV; and that it is for this reason that 'Racine's characters have no place in the social order ; they are outsiders who have lost their bearings as completely as Frédéric Moreau or any other nineteenth-century hero ' (p. 158). Has Mr. Turnell never asked himself how far it is Racine's conception of tragedy and tragic *démesure* which determine the passionate nature of his characters?

The best pages of the book are, I think, those on Corneille.

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The symbolism of the duel, the cut and thrust of the dialogue, with (it might be added) the tossing of a repeated word from speaker to speaker, the ' drama of initiation ' (p. 29) with the recurrent theme of hero and heroine who ' rise to the occasion '—all these points are excellently made and the often unobserved subtlety of Corneille is well brought out in several passages.

The Classical Moment ignores altogether the early comedies of Corneille which would have provided a suitable opportunity to talk about ' the middle class,' and to show how the apprenticeship of the *comédie d'intrigue* taught Corneille to organize *peripeteia* of his heroic plays. He also dismisses the later work in three pages. In the result Corneille's drama does not quite emerge as the rich and varied thing that it is, nor does Mr. Turnell see that his essential ideas on tragic (or more exactly heroic) drama make him the great example of what we may call French Baroque literature. The *Discours sur la Tragédie* are revealing in this connection. Choose the extraordinary event, the almost incredible story: but choose it, if possible, from a historical work. Once this has been done internal verisimilitude should be sought, but admiration rather than pity or terror will be the dominating sentiment to be provoked in the spectator. *Nicomède* has even more importance than Mr. Turnell allows, since this play—the drama of admiration—was not only, in Corneille's own view, the most original of all his works, but embodied a theory to which despite minor variations, he was faithful—artistically too faithful no doubt—up to the end of his long career.

The treatment of Molière is far more detailed. It contains many things well said, especially on *Don Juan,* and Mr. Turnell has relied on good guides (as in the essay on Corneille). But there is also much repetition, too many long quotations to preface a couple of lines of comment (pp. 67, 8 ; 84, 5 ; 128, 29, 30), and passages where one fears for the author's sense of humour. In one instance also for his knowledge of French (p. 71): it looks as if he did not know that *serrez ma haire avec ma discipline* means: put away my hair shirt with my scourge! and the subsequent metaphorical interpretation of *prisonniers* rather shakes one's faith in his good sense.

The view-point which lies behind these studies of Molière is stated in various forms and places. Namely that in Molière above all we find proclaimed the 'basic verities' of *ordre, mesure, équité, bon goût,* etc. (p. 10). They ' stand for something vivid and real.' The cause of their vividness lies precisely in the difficulty of these virtues to a generation of passionate men. It is this which gives rise to the 'passionate tug of war' so well dealt with on p. 15. It is this ' hot-headedness ' in Molière himself which is referred to by a recent French critic quoted on p. 49. Mr. Turnell does not give sufficient emphasis to his own idea, nor does he appear to have grasped firmly enough the essential general proposition that the ideals of a generation are commonly to be found in what it is not but would like to be. Thus, when he quotes from *Tartuffe* Cléante's famous

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' Les hommes la plupart sont étrangement faits
Dans la juste nature on ne les voit jamais '

his comment is merely ' This is the voice of true civilization, of a society in which it was natural to speak of measure and proportion,' and on p. 47 he tells us that the ' true representatives of the Age of Molière are the *honnêtes hommes* with their reasonable, tolerant outlook, their solid, unheroic virtues.' This is but a half-truth. His extravagant comic figures are no less representative in their violence. It is natural to the *honnête homme* to speak of measure and proportion just because these qualities are felt as difficult, and are therefore less unheroic than they appear.

Now one of the defects most to be eschewed by the *honnête homme* is violence and violent opinions. Ever since Charron's *Sagesse* (1601) the definition of superstition accepted by a diversity of Frenchmen was dogmatism or violence of opinion. This is the central defect of Orgon in *Tartuffe*. Violence is the comic vice of Orgon *par excellence*. It survives the unmasking of the villain, and Mr. Turnell misses the point of the last scene where the worthy Orgon, moving to direct a *coup de pied* at the disappearing hypocrite, is restrained by Cléante with

' Ne descends point, mon frère, à ces indignités '

There is thus no 'conversion' of Orgon, and Mr. Turnell's reference to one on p. 120 is meaningless. This violence is even given as a family trait, too, which takes its own characteristic forms in his mother and in his son. While Cléante's views are very justly dealt with by Mr. Turnell, it is a pity he has not explained with the help of Monsieur Michaut (whom he quotes) what the plot of the first *Tartuffe*, complete in three acts, must have been: a hypocrite in holy orders, no daughter, no Act II, and very probably an Elmire whose conduct was not so unlike that of George Dandin's wife. It might have helped him to discuss the somewhat ambiguous figure which she cuts in the play as we know it; and it should have led him to suspect that Orgon's behaviour *prior* to his meeting with Tartuffe was later set in a more favourable light merely in order to soften the attack on the ' unco guid ' and to bring the focus of the play to bear more emphatically on the hypocrite himself.

A long disquisition on *Le Misanthrope* rightly forms the centre-piece of this section of the book. Here I find the treatment excellent if somewhat laborious. Personally I should maintain that this play can best be summed up as one on the essential ambiguity of the term *honnête homme*. In its original sense, which was still felt as operative, it meant the honest, the virtuous or moral man. Yet it had come to mean (as we can see from La Rochefoucauld, the Chevalier de Méré and many a lesser writer) the man who knows *how to please*, who possesses the quality of *savoir vivre*, or still better, of a certain *savoir plaire*. Can honesty and *savoir plaire* be conciliated? This is not only the dilemma of Alceste but of every character in the play. Mr. Turnell is surely right in concluding that

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' the catharsis lies . . . in the perception that social adjustment is a personal matter where in the last resort no facile slogan or philosophical system can help us.' Or, as I should prefer: diversity is the very salt of life, and the ambition of being wholly consistent (or indeed wholly any *one* thing) is to invite not indeed perhaps moral disaster but at least the laughter of our fellow-men and onslaughts of the muse of comedy—a formulation less philosophical but more in keeping with the comic genius which was Molière's.

Taken all in all, we may apply to these pages Turnell's own judgment of Monsieur R. Fernandez' study of Molière—' stimulating but erratic.' Of the erratic I cannot refrain from giving yet one more example. Mr. Turnell quotes Harpagon's famous monologue from *L'Avare* in its entirety and analyses it in a page and a half: ' He imagines he is surrounded by a vast number of people . . . he proceeds to address the silent motionless figures of the nightmare . . . Suddenly the silent throng seems to come to life . . . etc., etc. (p. 124). These *people,* these *figures of a nightmare* are of course the audience in the theatre to whom Harpagon addresses himself. The actor who plays the part cannot speak the line: *Ils me regardent tous et se mettent à rire* until he has by gesture or grimace provoked an explosion (a new explosion?) of laughter.

It is obvious that Mr. Turnell has never seen this play on the stage—which is just hard luck. But how many, if any, of the plays dealt with in the volume has he seen on the stage? One finds oneself beginning to wonder.

If Mr. Turnell on Molière is erratic, much of what he has to say on Racine is just wrong (from which stricture I would except *Athalie and the Dictators,* the last chapter of this book). Some of his remarks already provoked on their appearance in *Scrutiny* some merited expostulations. The gravest charge is, however, that Mr. Turnell comes near to cooking the evidence in attempting to justify the claim that, ' in making sexual passion the supreme value in a world of dissolving values, the last refuge of a man who has lost faith in all else, Racine anticipates the writers of a later age ' (p. 182). Sexual passion is not the ' supreme value ' in Racine's plays: it is the supreme temptation. It is (to paraphrase Karl Vossler) the natural destiny of humanity, bringing tragic disaster in its wake: but over against it stand with increasing clearness from play to play, renunciation and sacrifice which are the spiritual vocation of man. It is through self renunciation that Andromaque, that Junie, that Monime and Xipharès, that Iphigénie survive the disaster that overwhelms others. The note of renunciation is there in the pathetic rôle of Atalide, it is the theme of *Bérénice.*

Bérénice is the greatest stumbling block to Mr. Turnell's view of Racine. He is obliged to argue that its composition was an uncongenial task, that hence its verse seems ' hollow and inflated,' and that Titus is a prig. It is necessary, however, to expose Mr. Turnell's methods at their worst by what may at first sight appear a slightly pedantic examination.

It is on the strength of five verses from Act II, Scene 2 (*Tu ne*

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l'ignores pas) that we are invited to regard Titus as a prig. I ask Mr. Turnell (and any reader) to consider the whole *tirade* (vv. 499-522, *Ah ! que sous de beaux noms cette gloire est cruelle,* etc.) from which these five lines are arbitrarily extracted. How arbitrarily may be seen by the fact that the opening *Tu ne l'ignores pas* refers as much to what precedes as what follows. It is Titus' love for Bérénice which in the past and under another sky has changed him from a weak pleasure-loving youth into one who has learnt *from her* to value courage, the public weal and the happiness of others. It is his immense moral debt to Bérénice which is the subject of the tirade (*Je lui dois tout, Paulin* . . .) and the cruelty of having to reward her so ill for what she has done for him as a man. All the more so, since as we learn from lines 431-438, Titus had once been blind enough to hope for the imperial crown only to be able to set Bérénice in the place which, in his devotion, he feels is rightly hers. The inability of Mr. Turnell to appreciate this essential factor of the situation at the outset of the play renders it easier for him to discount *Bérénice* as an aberration from the real genius of Racine.

Mr. Turnell continues: ' It is not surprising to find *after this* that *honneur* and *gloire* are invoked with great frequency.' Perhaps he is not sufficiently aware that the word *gloire* had in the 17th century the specific connotation of *merited reputation*. He certainly is oblivious to the irony with which Titus frequently uses the word throughout the play—an irony which is explained and determined by the fundamental debt of Titus to the woman he loves, an irony which is aimed, not at the conception *gloire* itself, but at the price which has to be paid for it by that woman still more than by himself.

Turnell gives three passages to illustrate Titus' preoccupation with his own feelings (pp. 189, 190). He admits that each of them begins with a reference to ' public virtues '—though these are not the verses which he quotes. But each of them do more; Titus enlarges on the irrevocable nature of his decision; he cries

' Il ne faut point ici nous attendrir tous deux '

adding that, if tears there must be, they shall be those of a queen and of an emperor—that is not those of mere private persons. He maintains in a third place that separation is the only thing which can save both of them from humiliation of one sort or another. It is not true that Titus is ' completely taken up with his own feelings.' His cruel task is to bring Bérénice whom he still loves to the same voluntary decision as he has made, and this cannot be done without reference to, and expression of, his feelings.

In fact the arbitrary quotation of a few verses from this scene or that is particularly unfortunate when applied to anything so highly organized as a play of Racine. Essentially Turnell condemns this play on two counts: he is convinced that Titus' motive is simply an empty concern with 'what people will think', and he finds a conviction of ' the importance of their emotions to history ' to be mere sentimentality. A moment's reflection on Roman history

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—so often evoked by Titus—will bring home the fact that only a full acceptance of fundamental Roman law and custom was compatible with the rôle of a reforming emperor to which the son of Vespasian aspired. All this is indeed stated by Paulin in that second crucial scene of Act II. It is in this sense that Titus is bound to set an example—which will have all the more force as coming from the possessor of effective absolute power.

It is true that in our eyes, in Racine's eyes, in the eyes of his principal characters, the Roman usage is little more than unreasonable prejudice. That is just what gives the double sacrifice of Titus and Bérénice its crowning touch not only of pathos, but of heroism. Suppose Racine had presented a justification of the Roman prejudice, had given us a Titus bowing only to a Senate insurrection, his play would have lost its whole point—and lost the truly Cornelian quality (in the best sense of the word) which it unquestionably possesses.

It may be true that the verse of *Bérénice* has not the same quality as that of *Andromaque* or *Phèdre*. Why should it have? Unlike all the other plays it is not only the tragedy of a shared and long-standing passion (only the discretion of stage convention may obscure the obvious fact that Bérénice is, and has long been, Titus' mistress), but it is intended by Racine as an exercise in the tragedy of *civilized beings* and, in more senses than one, the most modern of all his plays.

It would be idle to deny, however, that the treatment of Racine contains much that is sound and even penetrating. None the less we are again and again brought up against remarks that are misleading or impossibly far-fetched. A few examples must suffice.

Mr. Turnell makes great play with M. de Rougement's *Amour en Occident* with its psycho-analytic interpretation of the Tristan story. This is a doubtful prop in itself. Even if we admit Rougement's thesis, it still seems absurd to say that ' there is an obvious parallel between the mission of Tristan and the mission of Oreste in *Andromaque*, (p. 169). Again, it is not when Hermione has been ' finally thrown over by Pyrrhus ' (p. 177) that she says

Ah! je l'ai trop aimé pour ne le point haïr.

The line is in the very first scene of the play in which she appears. It is true enough that the clairvoyance of Racine's characters allow them to perceive unerringly the weakness of their opponents. But it is quite confusing to quote Hermione's bitterly ironical description of Pyrrhus' killing of Priam as an illustration of Pyrrhus' absence of pity (see p. 181).

The speech of Agrippine (*Britannicus*, IV) which moves Turnell to claim that ' the bed sticks out in Racine's poetry ' (p. 175) is of course a deliberately shameless revelation of the depths to which she has sunk, made to Nero in a final, fruitless and miscalculated effort to arouse a sense of gratitude for the price which she, his mother, has paid to place him on the throne.

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The unreliability of Mr. Turnell's methods of quotation could be illustrated *ad nauseam*, alas! On p. 183 a startling new example may be found. We are told that: 'When Alexandre declares:

> . . . au seul nom d'un roi jusqu'alors *invincible*
> A de nouveaux exploits mon coeur devint *sensible*

we feel at once . . . that there is a contrast between the heroic vocabulary and the lack of a corresponding drive in the texture of the verse. *Invincible* is a borrowing from Corneille, but ' mon coeur devint sensible' bears Racine's own stamp). In point of fact (whatever the poetic quality of these verses) Alexandre's *new exploits* in the context are those of generosity towards a conquered enemy, the making of him into a friend! *Sensible* is thus an entirely appropriate term and the further comments of Mr. Turnell (' The invincibility of the Cornelian hero . . . would never provoke the reaction attributed to Alexandre in these lines ') are seen to be directly belied by the very verses quoted.

When we turn to the chapter on *Phèdre* we find that Mr. Turnell is prepared, in this instance, to admit that sexual passion is no longer the ' supreme value ': but in his anxiety to use *Phèdre* as a biographical document (even a sociological one?), he proceeds to the other extreme in a way which to my mind disturbs his view of this play. It is not unfair to begin with Mr. Turnell's summing up. How far is Racine's play really amenable to the conclusions which he presents and which are concerned with the relation of the dramatist and this play?

> ' Phèdre stands for the guilty Racine of the past . . . Hippolyte stands for the new Racine, the pure young man that he would like to have been. This seems to be the true explanation of Phèdre's desperate concern with 'purity' . . . It may well be, as M. Rougement suggests, that Racine set out to punish his own guilty passion in this play, but the curse which Phèdre persuades Thésée to lay on Hippolyte is the outward sign of the internal ravages of her love for him. For the play is nothing less than a *suicide pact*. The Past infects the Present and in a sense, the Future; the old Racine infects the new, dragging him down miserably to the abyss . . . Human society is obliterated and only the eternal values remain intact. There is nothing left except to rebuild the human kingdom from the start with fresh material'.

Some of this may be plausible enough in a domain where all is guesswork, though I can make no sense of the phrase *suicide pact*. No curse is laid on Hippolyte *at Phèdre's entreaties* and far from human society being abolished, the climax of Theseus' grief at the end of the play is also, as Jean Louis Barrault puts it, *le triomphe d'Aricie*. The catastrophe brings with it a reconciliation and the obliteration of old feuds—an indication of *Neubeginn* which unity of subject prevents the dramatist developing, but which is certainly not concerned with 'new material'. However, once we enter the field

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of the unconscious, it is always possible to argue that by its ambivalence every motive is 'really' its own opposite. What concerns me more is to show how certain parts of the play as a play have been distorted in order to lend colour, as it would seem, to these conclusions.

Thus we are asked to believe that 'fatal passion' is an 'infection', that 'Phèdre infects the "insensible" Hippolyte who becomes desperately in love with Aricie'. But surely the total *difference* of Phèdre's love and Hippolyte's love (not to speak of Aricie's) is one of the fundamental themes of Racine's play. There is not a shred of evidence to show that Racine has hinted at any relation of cause and effect, nor could there be, since Hippolyte has admitted his passion for Aricie before he has the least inkling of what Phèdre's feelings for him are. It is part of his delineation as hitherto heart-whole, intact, that he should indulge in a movement of self-accusation, when he first makes his confession to Théramène. But Turnell's comment is 'Racine had become so obsessed by the Jansenist sense of the inherent sinfulness of sexual love that even Hippolyte's love for Aricie is described as a *fol amour* . . .' In point of fact the only fault with which Hippolyte reproaches himself is the comparative venial one in his eyes, in Théramène's eyes, and in Racine's eyes also, of contemplating a match of which his father will disapprove. His embarrassment before his father is no more than part of that natural nobility and reticence of character which ensures his destruction according to the most traditional tragic convention. This view is the one which the true pattern of the play with its niceties of adjustment demands and which Mr. Turnell's 'infection' would rule out.

Again in dealing with the scene in which Phèdre's jealousy of the newly discovered passion of Hippolyte for Aricie brings such a poignant contrast between *their* innocent happiness and her own unavowable torment, the scene which finds its most unforgettable notes in

Tous les jours se levaient clairs et sereins pour eux

and in the final

Ils s'aimeront toujours

Mr. Turnell declares that 'the idea of love has become for Phèdre inseparable from the idea of sin' (p. 209) and indulges in some involved special pleading on the use of terms such as *innocence* (which is apparently not innocence), and *furtive* (which surely means no more than 'shy'). Is one not justified in insisting that Phèdre's 'desperate concern with "purity",' her *rêve de candeur* as M. Blanchot calls it, is nowhere expressed more clearly than when, in the midst of her jealousy, she allows her mind to dwell in imagination on the young lovers?[2] The 'vicarious satisfaction' of

[2]It is at this point that the *fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë* is referred to as the 'ageing Amazon' (sic!).

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this scene is only achieved precisely because their love is seen as *not* sin. Nor indeed does this view in any way interfere with the supposition, if we care to make it, that Racine has projected onto Hippolyte something of the young man he would like to have been. Indeed it fits such a supposition much better than the interpretation of the scene given in *The Classical Moment*.

It is, of course, true that the rôles of Hippolyte and Aricie need the sympathetic insight of actors and producer to come alive in the way that Phèdre herself does even from the printed page. It may be that she stands in some peculiar relationship to the dramatist, whether it is that suggested by Rougement and Turnell. Yet there cannot be the slightest justification for the notion that this play has any specifically contemporary reference in the sense which *The Classical Moment* seems to imply, and indeed the alleged 'Jansenism' of the play (if not of the subsequent Preface) remains highly debatable.

'Jansenism' and 'contemporary problems' figure also in Mr. Turnell's study of *Athalie,* but here with far more justification. It is to my mind the most satisfactory of his chapters on Racine. It is indeed impossible to believe that no link between the persecuted Port Royal and the Levites of the play has been made by Racine. Mr. Turnell's view (as revised for his book) is that it marks too a certain scepticism about the future not only of Jansenism but of the advent of a new Christian society. Surely it would be safer to say that some of the greatness of the conception of the play is just the implication that persecution, regeneration, falling away from God and return to Him are the stuff of which the web of human history is woven.

Much of this long article must indeed sound like a total condemnation of the book—and what can be more tedious than a prolonged *éreintement*! It is, however, just because *The Classical Moment* contains so much that is excellent that it is somebody's business to point out its failings both for the public's and Mr. Turnell's sake. Let us hope that some of these may be amended in a subsequent edition. The author is in a fair way to acquire the reputation of one of our better British critics of French literature. Would it sound too pedantic or academic to suggest that it would be everybody's misfortune if he were to be regarded as an authority before he has become a little more scholarly?

ALAN M. BOASE.

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THE NEW ANTIQUARIANISM

THE THEORY OF LITERATURE, by René Wellek and Austin Warren (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1949, 4$ 50).

There would be little need to call this book to the attention of the English reading public if it did not appear so authentically and decisively to represent the voice of the critical-academic future in America. Undoubtedly a turning point has been reached. The antiquarian mills are closing down, or working on a schedule of strictly limited production. New factories are now springing up with newer equipment, tools more diversified, packages more brightly wrapped. Or, to put it another way: here is a pleasant world, circumscribed, comfortable, leisurely. It is bounded by the file-card cabinet, the card-catalogue, the library-stack and reading-room, the private study, the classroom, slashes of green (or asphalt) in the distance, and the prospect of endless, interminable 'problems' to keep one diverted for many years to come.

It is in its way impressive. Learned, even encyclopaedic, it manages to survey the whole province of literary theory, practice, scholarship, history and pedagogy. It maps sharply each separate division and the subordinate parts in the division. It summarizes achievements fairly, assessing intelligently, for example, the value of what it is supplanting: the scholarship concerned with 'The Ordering and Establishing of Evidence'—one of the better chapters. Mostly the book judges rival claims, stating each case honestly and in proportionate detail. Then, in common-sense fashion almost unique in the common practice of special (not to say 'private') pleading, it adjudicates well. Critically alert and knowledgeable, it moves with assurance among the contemporary problems of 'intention', 'Image, Symbol, Myth', 'Literature and Psychology', 'Literature and Ideas', 'semasiology' and the rest. Its language is intelligible and establishes the ground for discourse where differences of opinion exist. Not many will want to contest too vigorously its summing up of any given claim. It is, thus, a *tour de force*, and one would like to see it placed on library shelves as a kind of indispensable reference book for those students interested *not* in literary analysis, evaluation and tradition, but in literary 'problems'.

But it aspires to more than text-book status. The last chapter indicates its essential intention of wishing to train graduate students, and through them all students, in the general approach and method. As such it appears to me clearly a major catastrophe, for it will undoubtedly have considerable influence.

Surely the volumes gathering dust on university library shelves ought long ago conclusively to have demonstrated that impressiveness in scope and detail—the achievement of Wellek and Warren—may be barren, academic. Details must be ordered into significance by clearly defined criteria and controlled strictly at every step by central and relevant critical preoccupations. Each subordinate

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aspect of the complex critical-scholarly act must be given relative value. There are no such criteria, there is no such controlling purpose in this book. Instead of a clearly conceived sense of direction, instead of rigorous subordination, they offer only the awareness of countless difficulties: the problem of 'The Nature of Literature', and the scores of minor problems into which it may be subdivided; the multifaceted problems of 'The Function of Literature'; of 'Euphony, Rhythm, and Meter', 'Style and Stylistics', 'Image, Metaphor, Symbol, Myth', 'The Nature and Modes of Narrative Fiction'. The formulation is characteristically abstract, and the student is encouraged to thread his way through an extensive bibliography. So that when Wellek and Warren say at one point: 'The neatness and perfection with which certain problems can be solved have always attracted minds which enjoy orderly procedure and the intricacies and manipulations, quite apart from any final significance which they may have . . . ', the unconscious irony is devastating.

They offer, implicitly, certain assumptions which, accepted and practised, can have only the most deplorable consequences. The first is that it is profitable to discuss in the abstract the differences between literature and literary study and the other disciplines—the world of 'practice', philosophy, science, social studies, types of history and the rest. They say, characteristically: 'A full discussion of these problems would involve decisions on such problems as the classification of the sciences, the philosophy of history, and the theory of knowledge'—and they urge such study later as part of a positive programme. In the second place, they assume that it is profitable, when one is confronted with different works of some excellence (the degree of excellence, incidentally, having been determined for Wellek and Warren by the better critics), to search for 'aesthetic laws' which can be abstractly formulated as 'standards' and applied from the outside. And they assume, finally, that the relationship of literature to 'biography', 'psychology', 'society', 'ideas', and the 'fine arts' can be profitably explored without first and indispensably beginning with the better writing in the tradition.

At the expense of trying the patience of *Scrutiny* readers who are undoubtedly familiar with these matters, the point may best be driven home, perhaps, by offering principles of subordination against which some of the major inadequacies of the Wellek and Warren position may be seen. To begin with: the American student, even more than the English, enters the university without the ability to read. The pervasive *ambiance* is corrupting: newspaper, radio, television, cinema, slick magazines, best-seller and worse. If one believes that the very exercise of literary-critical judgment as it leads to an assimilation of the better literature has important bearings, in the last analysis, on the choices one makes in day-to-day living, one offers a central critical preoccupation. Students must be taught *first of all* to discriminate between the cheap commercial appeal and the genuine; then to discriminate among the genuine. For against the better literature they define the precise nature and quality of

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belief and attitude. One is strongly tempted to Veblenize the situation when one considers that in America, where the vulgarization of literature has reached a pitch never achieved elsewhere, the university averts its nose.

Indeed, the book by Wellek and Warren represents the subtle, rarefied, ineffectual flower unaware of the existence of the dung out of which it grows. To ask where undergraduate, graduate or university lecturer is to get the necessary training is, from their point of view, to ask perhaps a vulgar impertinence. Instead they employ the unconscious trick (one uses the word in no really prejorative sense) of dismissal by reduction. They reduce the 'art' of 'reading' to 'an ideal for purely personal cultivation', desirable for 'widely spread literary culture'—invoking, in this way, the image of the exquisite palate. They are able, then, to their own satisfaction to conclude that this kind of dilettante ideal cannot 'replace the conception of "literary scholarship" ', cannot replace 'organized knowledge'. The argument collapses, it would seem, if one questions the validity of 'replace' and substitutes an alternative: intelligent reading habits as a necessary first step leading to relevant knowledge, including literary scholarship.

There is, next, the concept of 'tradition'. Students must be given the equipment, the necessary formulations, the orientation and the practice which will lead them to earn that tradition for themselves. The force of one of Eliot's major contributions to contemporary criticism is entirely lost on Wellek and Warren. They substitute for it instead the usual notion of academic 'influence'. 'The real critical problems in this kind of study arise when we reach the stage of weighing and comparing, of showing how one artist utilizes the achievements of another artist, when we watch the transforming power'. Graham Greene transforming Stevenson? Shadwell transforming Jonson? James M. Cain transforming Hemingway?

The first task of the literary-critical discipline, for student and expert alike, is that of determining—demonstrating in particular, concrete acts of analysis and judgment—the degree of achieved realization of intention in the work of literature itself. Wellek and Warren are indeed *aware* that this is so, that we study Shakespeare, for example, not for 'what he has in common with all men', but 'to discover what is peculiarly Shakespeare's, what makes Shakespeare Shakespeare'. But do they maintain unequivocally that this can be done only by analysis of indivual works, by delicate comparisons and juxtapositions, where one may show discussible qualitative differences? Hardly. They conclude merely that 'this is obviously a problem of individuality and value'. They substitute, in other words, profitless philosophic speculations about the meaning of 'individuality and value' in works of literature, for the exacting task of first-hand judgment.

The full critical act begins—whatever the complexity of the intermediate stages—with personal responsiveness, the impact kept alive and organic. So far as one can see, Wellek and Warren seem entirely to have eliminated the only justification for taking literature

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seriously in the first place—the fact that 'it takes place in the developing consciousness of our lives' (L. C. Knights). They substitute in its place the kind of liveliness which attends the solution of intellectual problems.

With respect to 'intention' on the level of information, there is considerable margin for 'scholarship', exegeses of all kinds: 'conventions', 'technique', or, to follow the order of Wellek and Warren, biography, psychology, ideas, society, fine arts. But this search for information is only a trap, a deception and a quicksand, a substitute for intelligent reading, unless it is made strictly relevant to the degree of realization achieved, the distance between intention purposed and intention achieved. The error of Wellek and Warren here, as has been already suggested, is not that of unawareness, but the absence of rigorous subordination. They will say: 'Nobody can deny that much light has been thrown on literature by a proper knowledge of the conditions under which it has been produced; the exegetical value of such a study seems indubitable. Yet it is clear that casual study can never dispose of problems of description, analysis, and evaluation of the object as such as a work of literary art'. Or: 'All history, all environmental factors, can be argued to shape a work of art. But the actual problems begin when we evaluate, compare, and isolate the individual factors which are supposed to determine the work of art'. There is awareness, true enough. But in the context the individual statement appears almost as an afterthought, one idea democratically placed among scores of ideas, no more important, no less. And the force of the statement is invariably abstract, the solution offered in the abstract terms of 'problems'. They spend five chapters, thus, on matters which, properly subordinated, might have been disposed of easily in one.

The training of the student—the practice continuing on all levels—should be one principally in practical criticism—in its most inclusive sense. The student develops economy of skill and direction by continual, particular acts of interpretation and judgment on the concrete text, checked first by qualified guides, later by colleagues and the critical public. Here the indispensable guide is, and can only be, *good practice*. Wellek and Warren perceive at one point—once again simply as another critical perception which fails to order the full chapter—that the 'valuing of the poem is the experiencing, the realization, of æsthetically valuable qualities and relationships in the poem for any competent reader'. Our most competent readers are our best critics—or those individual essays where the best practice is exemplified. Wellek and Warren offer hardly a single unequivocal example. Instead, most of the examples offered (p. 289) represent exegetical criticism in many forms—and even here they fail to evaluate among them.

Standards inevitably grow out of the continual effort to fix the degree of realization. They are simply the convenient means, the roughest and most flexible tips, nothing more, for mobilizing sensibility for the purpose of demonstrating what qualities in the writing we find effective or ineffective. Again, one of Eliot's con-

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tributions was the offering of strategic tips for formulating more effectively our reasons for approval or disapproval: 'impersonality', 'felt thought'. It is here above all that Wellek and Warren are most unsatisfactory, for their standards are offered as aesthetic 'laws', externally imposed: 'complexity and coherence', 'integration and artistic intensity', 'multivalence', 'ironies and tensions'. Mr. Leavis in his early controversy with Mr. Wellek,[1] demonstrated crushingly the serious limitations in such an approach. But Mr. Wellek, apparently acquiescing in the demonstration, has continued in the old ways.

What, then, do they offer positively? What do they represent? They usher in the New Era. And the surpassing ingenuity of the new antiquarianism is that it utilizes so well all the existing machinery of the old, with almost imperceptible alterations. At present American faculties in English are staffed with specialists of the recognizable kind: Milton men, Shakespeare men, Beowulf and Chaucer men, seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century men. With minor specializations. A revolution is now in progress. Soon we shall have (p. 291): The-Nature-and-Function-of-Literature-men, Freud-and-Jung-in-Relation-to-Literature-men, History-of-Ideas - in - the - nineteenth - Century - in - Relation - to - Literature -men, Catholic-Religion-in-Relation-to-Literature-men, Social-and-Political-Ideas-in-Relation-to-American-Literature-men. On the graduate level, the 'contributions to knowledge', barren in much the same way, will merely change with the fashion. Now we shall have Ph.D. dissertations on 'The Mythic Element in the Short Stories of Willa Cather', 'Freudianism in John Lyly', 'Poetic Epistemology in the Poetry of Robert Frost', and 'The Explorative Symbol in the Works of Abraham Cowley'. And the same jealousy, fear and ruthless competition—the motor-car and toothpaste influence of the business world outside—will continue unabated within each faculty, each man guarding his speciality. The English critical and academic public will watch the transformations with some interest.

There is, as has been suggested, a sensible and legitimate use for the book: a kind of reference for students who become interested, in the natural course of literary study in peripheral problems. The bibliography—what they offer is only a skeleton; the original must have been extensive beyond belief—might have legitimate uses. But there is too considerable an investment by this time in the new antiquarianism. Too much would have to be scrapped in offering a common-sense alternative to the democratic fragmentation Wellek and Warren offer. Besides, they are excellently provided with a dismissing apparatus. They have categories for all occasions, and any alternative would be at once abstracted, reduced, tagged and rendered inocuous.

SEYMOUR BETSKY.

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[1] *Scrutiny*, March, June, September, 1937. Reproduced in *The Importance of Scrutiny*, edited by Eric Bentley. George W. Stewart Co., New York, 1949.

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PROUST AND HIS CRITICS

THE TWO WORLDS OF MARCEL PROUST, by Harold March (*O.U.P.*, 16/-).

MARCEL PROUST, by Élisabeth de Gramont (*Flammarion*, 220 fr.).

LE STYLE DE MARCEL PROUST, by Jean Mouton (*Collection 'Mises au Point', Corrêa*, 270 fr.).

'For some readers', writes Mr. March, 'Proust's novel is gloomy, decadent, in itself a sufficient explanation of why the country that produced it went down to defeat in 1940; for others, a smaller number, it is radiant with youthful hope, poetry, and faith'. Literary critics would do well to avoid the word 'decadent' unless they are prepared to define it rigorously. In the sense in which it is used here, it has no application to literature and merely conveys a vague suggestion of moral disapproval which is not neutralized by 'some readers'. For it is one of the shortcomings of this conscientious, painstaking study that we are never sure where the author stands and that we are haunted by the spectre of a serious-faced American academic grimly pursuing a distasteful task. The impression is confirmed by Mr. March's scattered observations. He speaks of a typical French village 'with its choirboy carrying the Host to some deathbed' and translates *poule* (meaning 'tart') by 'chicken'. They are small points, but they make us wonder whether the writer is sufficiently familiar with the French background to approach Proust with the knowledge and sympathy which the undertaking requires. On p. 57 he describes the author of *Pastiches et mélanges*, rather primly, as 'a clever imitator, a first-rate specimen of a third-rate class'. But Proust's pastiches were altogether exceptional and (as M. Mouton shows) they can tell us a great deal about the writers who are parodied as well as about the formation of Proust's own style. The comments on Feuillerat on pp. 243-4 seem to me to be unjust to the point of travesty, though Mr. March makes somewhat tardy amends in his bibliography. 'Prerequisite to the enjoyment of Proust', he writes in another place, 'is a preference for the overtones of experience to experience itself. Proust writes for introverts'. I do not entirely follow the distinction between 'the overtones of experience' and 'experience itself', but I am quite sure that 'introverts' has the same derogatory implications as 'decadent'. It is not surprising after this to learn that 'As a realistic panorama of society the novel is far inferior to Balzac's *Comédie humaine*'. In so far as this suggests that 'a realistic panorama of society' is intrinsically meritorious, the criterion seems to me to be of doubtful validity. Mr. March is perfectly entitled to prefer Balzac to Proust—many Frenchmen do—but an admiration for the over-simplified view of society that we find in the *Comédie humaine* is likely to prove

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a liability in dealing with Proust or with a novel like Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwen*.

The Anglo-Saxon public often seems to prefer reading about the lives of great writers to reading their books. This probably explains the popularity of the 'critical biography' of which Mr. March's book is an example. His first chapter, 'The Climate of Ideas', gives an account of Proust's intellectual background. He mentions most of the prominent European thinkers and most of the literary movements of the nineteenth century—he matches 'decadence' with 'counter-decadence'—but the impression which emerges is one of considerable confusion. It is, broadly speaking, true to say that Proust's work was a reaction against nineteenth-century naturalism, but it is only part of the truth. Mr. March thinks that the 'theoretic core' of Symbolism 'rested squarely on Schopenhauer and Hartmann', but he does not mention Descartes to whom Proust acknowledged a debt. If he had gone more carefully into the long-term influence of the idealist systems on literature and the implications of the Romantic revolt against the classic tradition, he would have been more successful in 'situating' Proust.

The next two chapters deal on the whole adequately with Proust's life. The only reason for writing about a novelist's life is to illuminate his work. Heredity did play an important part in Proust's formation; but though he remarks that his father was a Catholic and his mother a Jewess, Mr. March does not examine the question as thoroughly as he might have done. Proust's father came of a middle-class provincial family which has been traced back to the early seventeenth century. Dr. Adrien Proust was the first of the family to leave Illiers and seek his fortune in Paris. Now it seems to me that heredity was largely responsible for Marcel's feeling for the historic France which gives the novel its weight and solidity and explains what Mr. March well describes, in speaking of his style, as 'a firm classical substratum of precision, balance, and antithesis'. Proust was, as all his biographers have pointed out, essentially his mother's son as his brother Robert was his father's. Mme de Gramont suggests that the fact that he was born during the anxious days which followed the French defeat may have tipped the scales. 'Ce petit être', she says rightly if a trifle flamboyantly, 'devait contenir à la fois toute la saveur terrienne des Proust d'Illiers et toute l'âme biblique de ses ancêtres maternels'.

One reviewer has commended Mr. March's treatment of Proust's homosexuality for its 'tact', but his references to Krafft-Ebing ('Case 110 of the seventh edition') seem to me a little heavy-handed. He dismisses the late Maurice Sachs's rather frivolous 'Historiette', which appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1938, as 'scandal about Proust's homosexuality'; but he does not seem to have read the same writer's *le Sabbat* which was published some months before his own book went to press. Sachs is by no means an unimpeachable witness, but his account of 'Les Bains du Ballon

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d'Alsace' and its effect on Proust's work is plausible. It is of some importance to notice that the story is partially confirmed by Mme de Gramont on pp. 209-210 of her study.

It is fashionable at the present time to insist on the importance of the stories and sketches in *les Plaisirs et les jours* for an understanding of Proust. Mr. March analyses the book with care, but it is difficult not to feel that to spend 30 out of 250 pages on it is unduly generous and is distinctly out of proportion to its intrinsic worth. The chapters on *A la Recherche du temps perdu* seem to me to be the least satisfactory in the book. They contain useful information about its content, but do not say anything very new. There is too much about 'characters', 'Marcel and Albertine' and 'transcendental reality' ('mystic experience' is another expression which might well be removed from the vocabulary of literary criticism). The discussion of Proust's style which is almost exclusively based on translated passages—Mr. March's versions do not seem to me to be an improvement on Scott-Moncrieff—is necessarily inconclusive.

It would perhaps be unfair to suggest that Mme de Gramont's book should have been called 'Tales from Proust', but it is as well that she has entered the field late. If her book had been published when Proust was a 'smart' author, it would almost certainly have become a substitute for reading his novel. She begins with a short biographical sketch and devotes most of the remaining 210 pages to a summary of the novel. The writer seems to have known Proust and his circle well, and her summary is interspersed with clues to his models ('Quant à la princesse des Laumes, c'est une personne que j'ai bien connue jadis . . . '). It seems a pity that Mme de Gramont did not abandon the idea of a summary and give us a book of memoirs which would have been more useful as well as more entertaining.

Her book is interesting for another reason. It helps to bring home to us the part played by non-literary factors in Proust's eclipse in the 'thirties and his present revival. The solemn, politically-minded writers of the 'thirties were inclined to dismiss him as the laureate of a dying society who had no 'message' for those who were naïvely awaiting the rosy dawn. Now that an egalitarian society is becoming a reality and levelling down has been elevated into a political first principle, we are more conscious of what was valuable in the aristocratic societies of the past. Some contemporary critics accept Feuillerat's view that Proust's picture of the aristocracy was too black; and it can scarcely be denied that it was disfigured by an unworthy element of petty spite. There is therefore something engaging about Mme de Gramont's evocation of Paris in the first decade of the present century and the vision of Laure Heymann passing 'dans sa gloire impure'.

Nevertheless, it is a relief to turn from the American view of Proust and from Mme de Gramont's chatty volume to a book which does promise to put first things first. For Proust has had altogether too much attention from philosophers, psychologists and gossip-

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writers and altogether too little from literary critics. It is a curious fact that until the publication of M. Mouton's study, the two most determined attempts to deal with Proust's style were by German critics. The first was Dr. Ernst Robert Curtius's admirable essay which was republished about 1925 in his *Französischer Geist im Neuen Europa*,[1] and the second Leo Spitzer's long essay, 'Zum Stil Marcel Proust's', which appeared in the second volume of his *Stilstudien* in Munich in 1928. M. Mouton has evidently read Spitzer with profit, but his footnote reference does far less than justice to that very able piece of work. The philological approach has one obvious danger. The philologist is interested in *language* in the narrow sense instead of in *style* in the wide sense; his analysis illustrates and classifies the various uses to which language can be put instead of isolating the qualities of a particular writer's sensibility. M. Mouton, indeed, remarks: 'Leo Spitzer enregistre de nombreux faits de langue ou de style, mais n'en tire qu'incidemment des conclusions d'ordre psychologique ou moral'. It is a criticism which might not unfairly be applied to his own book. A certain amount of schematism is inevitable in an undertaking of this kind, but his book is rather too schematic. Discussions of 'Marcel Proust's Ideas on Style' and 'The Formation of Proust's Style' are followed by chapters on 'Les Images', 'Le Rythme', 'L'Énumération' and 'Le Langage des Personnages'. His account of Proust's imagery is little more than a description of the sources—religion, art, nature—on which he drew for his images, and it is a pity that he decided not to include a chapter on his vocabulary. But if his book does not contain anything as illuminating as Spitzer's discussion of the Proustian parenthesis, there are plenty of useful critical observations in it. It has one great advantage over the work of the philosophical critics: it sends us back to Proust's text instead of carrying us away into a realm of abstraction. If I had to make a list of the six most useful books on Proust I should include Curtius, Spitzer and Mouton.

MARTIN TURNELL.

[1] A French translation of the essay on Proust was published by La Nouvelle Revue, Paris, in 1928.

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THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION

AN ESSAY ON THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION, by Eric James (Harrap, 5/-).

This admirable little essay deserves to be widely known. Lucidly and straightforwardly written, it contains an excellent defence of the much abused 'academic' position in current educational practice, and a penetrating analysis of contemporary educational clichés. Aware of the difficulties inherent in any attempt to educate a whole population—though convinced of its necessity—Dr. James yet views with apprehension that shift in the balance of interest from what is to be learnt to the process of learning, for it is the latter that so occupies the minds of professional educationalists to-day. He is not concerned to lay down a detailed syllabus but 'rather to emphasize certain general ideas which (any) curricula should embody' (p. 62); it should be stated, however, that the clarity of Dr. James' exposition inspires confidence in his capacity to implement his general principles by a detailed and reasonable series of educational expectations in terms of age and capacity of pupil. At a time when 'The acquisition of a certain body of knowledge as one of the desirable ends of education seems to be discussed less often, and certainly less intelligently, than the means by which activities may be stimulated or particular habits of thought inculcated', his essay is both pertinent and salutary; for, as he adds, 'activity must use some material, and thought must be about something' (p. 9). There is indeed 'a minimum of essential knowledge appropriate to different ages and levels of intelligence' (p. 49).

The notion embodied in the famous sentence of the Primary School report: 'The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored', has, at the moment, a wide currency; Dr. James' insistence on the necessary basis of factual knowledge is to be applauded. 'Too often', he asserts, 'those who demand the inculcation of attitudes rather than facts—the attitude of willingness to find out for oneself, to think logically, and so on—fail to realize both how difficult is the development of such attitudes, and also what a firm foundation of elementary factual knowledge they assume' (p. 48). Moreover Dr. James insists on a differentiation of value as between the various 'subjects' . . . 'The present tendency to equalize all subjects in status and esteem can only rest ultimately upon a profoundly materialistic philosophy' (p. 58), and he goes on to point out the mistake made by the materialists which serves to defeat the very ends they have in mind:

> '. . . a society which fails to value academic studies adequately will not be successful even in the material sense, since the most fertile discoveries and most revolutionary ideas spring from those with high academic intelligences working usually in the

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> academic field, a fact that is forgotten when suggestions are made that some of our highest intelligences must be encouraged to go into purely technical fields. These considerations must be borne in mind when we are faced with attacks upon what is described as "merely verbal education", compared unfavourably, if vaguely, with practical pursuits. Such comparison seems to ignore altogether that the whole progress of thought, of social organization, certainly of education itself, rests upon concepts which are verbal in character, and which depend for their use and development upon highly trained verbal intelligence (p. 58-9).

Dr. James indeed stresses that education bears a vital relationship to the life of society, that it has in fact a social function to perform; but he allows for no surrender to naïvely conceived social ends. The purpose of education, he considers 'is not only to produce the kind of citizens that the community demands, in terms of intellectual and technical and moral equipment. It is also concerned to ensure that the community shall be of such a nature that it demands the right kind of citizens' (p. 11). His view of what constitutes 'life in society' is reassuring: 'It is true enough that the content of our education must at every point be related to life, but the phrase has a far deeper significance than is guessed by many of those who use it, and in thinking of its social and economic meanings we must not overlook the life of the mind and the spirit' (p. 55).

Important, too, are Dr. James' considerations of what constitutes a university (pp. 63-70) and his lucid untanglings of the contradictions inherent in the current accepted notions concerning specialization and equality of opportunity. At a time when the notion of a 'general education' on the American model is still widely prevalent his remarks on specialization are of great interest. He rightly remarks, incidentally, that 'the emulation of American methods . . . is one of the most lamentable elements in contemporary English educational thought' (p. 85). He asserts, on grounds that his analysis makes adequate, 'that a considerable degree of specialization must occur and need not be disastrous' (p. 73), and stresses, rightly to my mind, 'the educational value of a fairly deep study of a limited field, even in the upper forms of schools' (p. 71), pointing out that 'the effect of this apparent narrowing of the field of vision often results in a remarkable growth in intellectual power and range' (p. 87). He recognizes, however, the problem of narrow scientific research. He contends that such broadening of university studies as is thought, after careful consideration has been given to the problem of what is to constitute an educated man, to be necessary should be in the direction of philosophical inquiry; this is perhaps open to question. Literary studies tackled in the right way, could, for many students, provide perhaps a more adequate widening of experience.

In his comments on the question of equality of opportunity, Dr. James probes some of the ambiguities of the phrase. He points out that political equalitarianism in effect denies equality of oppor-

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tunity, which can only arise when children of similar intellectual endowment are placed together. Further, the consequences of such politically inspired equalitarianism may have serious repercussions on the content of education: 'Studies which have hitherto been followed only by a minority acquire all the odium attaching to privilege of any kind. An equalitarian society will not look with favour on abilities possessed only by a few or tolerate opportunities enjoyed by a minority, even if they are freely open to all men with the right kind of ability' (p. 94); we may thus be faced 'not only with a plain denial of equality of opportunity, but with a narrowing and impoverishment of the whole content of education' (p. 95), and in such a case 'the loss to the community, in economic, social, and spiritual well-being, the deep injustice involved towards the ablest members of society, are out of all proportion to the number involved' (p. 96). The plea that a common core of subjects for all children should form the basis of the school curriculum—the plea of the Harvard report—is met by the acute comment that 'the resemblance between a given subject as learned by a very intelligent child and a dull child is purely nominal' (p. 98).

Dr. James ends with an expression of hope which, it is to be trusted, will be considered. Searching for an authority in whom final decisions about curriculum, at all levels, may be vested, he rejects, for various adequate reasons, the local education committees, the parents and the children themselves; instead, he wishes to place the responsibility on the universities—understood to mean 'the consensus of academic opinion, the mind of the clerisy, or the convictions of the academic élite'. He regrets that 'it is true to say that the guardians of the academic tradition are not sufficiently conscious of their responsibilities' (p. 114). He might, indeed, have added that remarkably few of them, even among the younger members, have much conception of what is going on or of the way in which the academic and intellectual standards of the country, so far as state education is concerned, at least, are being threatened by inadequate social theorisation and hasty and often unwise experimentation. Rightly, Dr. James draws attention to the danger of shelving responsibility on to university departments of education. Educational experts 'need not have a truer vision of the proper ends of education in its fullest sense than a professor of minerology' (p. 115). 'It is alarming', he continues, 'to find that a person who has done some statistical work on the correlation among eight-year-olds between reading quotients and capacity to stick pegs into holes, perhaps very valuable in its context, becomes thereby an 'educationist' and qualified to speak with authority on the broadest questions of educational policy' (p. 116). He advises therefore that a small committee of university teachers and members of the inspectorate should be set up to 'consider the question (of the proper mental equipment of the educated man at university level) in the light of first principles' (p. 118), and conceives the possibility that such discussion might be adapted to all levels of the educational process.

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I have contented myself with summarizing Dr. James' position, for it is one with which I find myself so much in sympathy that comment would be superfluous. The recognition of the need for an adequately constituted centre of authority in educational matters, the exposure of current claptrap and the realization of diversity of value as between different educational undertakings, all go to make Dr. James' book unusual among current educational writings. It is sad to think that even fifty years ago Dr. James' book would have been regarded as redundant, not because it would provoke disagreement but because it would merely state what educated people normally assumed. To-day he will provoke more dissent than agreement—I have heard him described by a dignitary of the educational world as 'narrow'. That a genuine concern for 'maintaining the standards of culture through a time of immense social change, (for) ensuring that, as more men and women come into their inheritance of that culture' they should not find it 'mortgaged and debased' should be open to such description is as clear an indication as could be wished of the danger in which we stand.

G. H. BANTOCK.

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